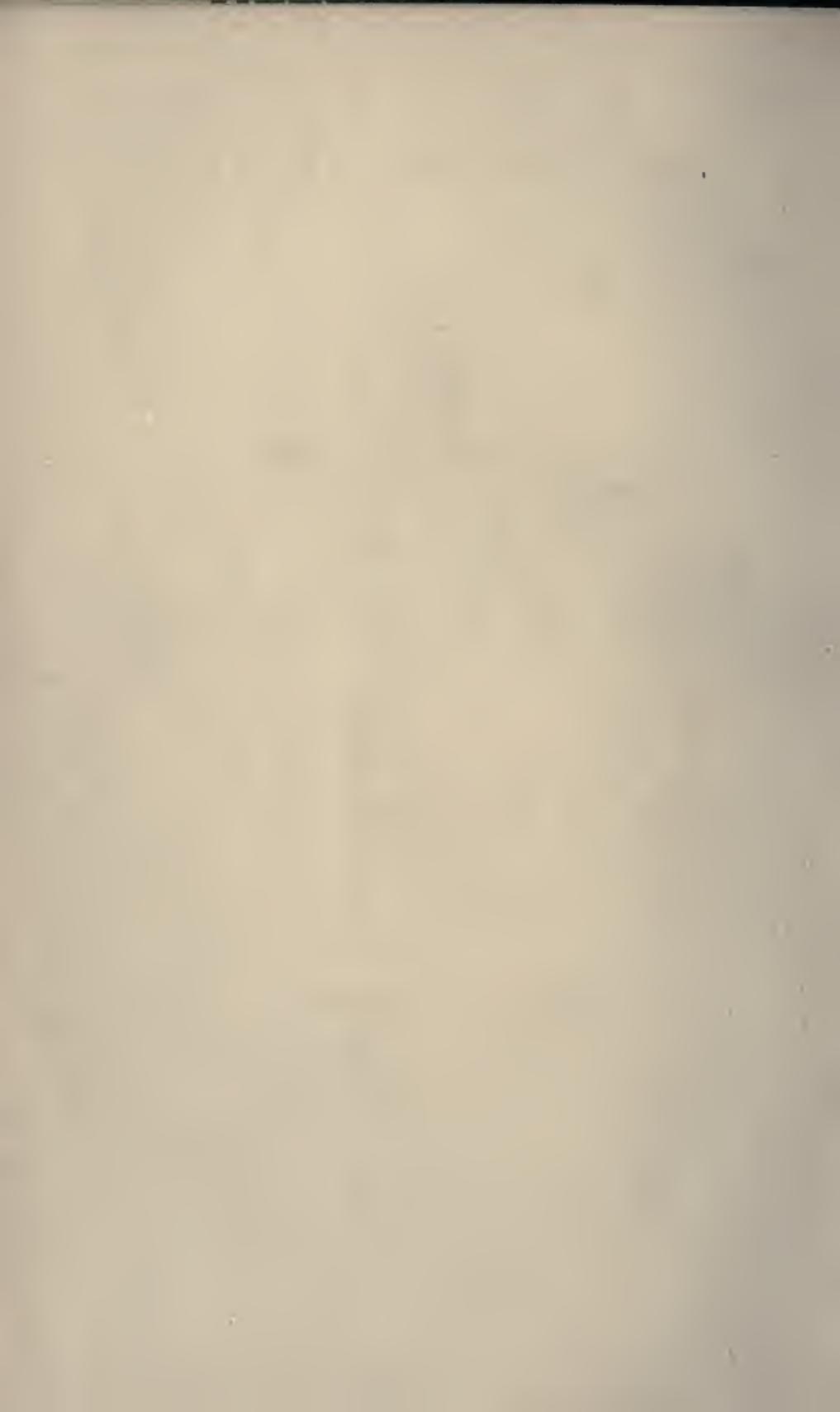


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CONFessions OF A CONVERT,

FROM

BAPTISM IN WATER

TO

BAPTISM WITH WATER.

FROM THE SECOND ENGLISH EDITION.

PHILADELPHIA:
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P R E F A C E.

“Who is the author of Confessions of a Convert?” “Who is Mr. B.?” “Who is Mr. R.?” “Is the book fact or fiction?” These are questions which curiosity may ask, but which, for sundry reasons, cannot now be answered.

There is, however, one query to which a reply may be returned;—it is this, “Why have these ‘Confessions’ been published to the world?” Not, certainly, because works on the main subject to which they relate are either scarce or unsatisfactory. Writers, such as Edwards, Ewing, Wardlaw, Thorn, Halley, and Godwin, have left but scanty gleanings in this well-trodden field of controversy for any of their successors. But most of their treat-

ises are much too long and learned for popular use. They are far better adapted to the ministers and more reflecting members of our churches than to the mass, who have neither time nor talent for the study of productions so elaborate. The result is, that while those by whom they are read rise from the perusal strong as proof from Holy Writ can make them in their belief of the authority and excellence of a practice so ably defended, as the number of such readers is comparatively small, the effect has been proportionally restricted. For general benefit, a different class of books is essential,—books that will interest, while they instruct, and which contain reasonings “made easy” to ordinary minds. Such a book the writer of the following pages has endeavoured to produce. But whilst, in writing it, he has aimed at popular instruction in general, there is particularly one class whose special benefit he has kept in view—THE YOUNG. Knowing well the means often employed to mislead them on the subject of baptism, he has been anxious to supply an antidote to the arts and sophistries by which

they are likely to be assailed. Let ministers and parents aid him by placing it in their hands, and he is assured that it will not be without advantage to their youthful charge.

If some readers are staggered at a few of the incidents narrated in the following pages, the writer would assure them that he has withheld several other circumstances far more startling than those which are detailed, and which might have been confirmed by many witnesses, solely because they would supply indications of ignorance, superstition, and prejudice which would seem incredible. But he is persuaded that none, who are acquainted with the *class* of Baptists of whom he has spoken, will deem the portraiture he has drawn either incorrect or over-coloured. He uses the words “class of Baptists,” because much of what he has written will apply only to a portion of that body; a portion, however, by no means small, and one whose sentiments and spirit inflict still greater injury upon their own denomination than upon those whose practice they oppose. But the author is persuaded better things of many others from

whom he differs, and is confident that they would repudiate as strongly as he does the arguments and proceedings which he has endeavoured to expose.

No one desires more devoutly than the writer the dawn of that day when the question of baptism shall cease to vex the church. But recent events—especially the formation of the “Bible Translation Society” and the “Baptist Tract Society,” with the speeches at the meetings of the one, and the publications issued by the other, too plainly show that such a period is distant. Under these circumstances, Pædo-baptists must defend their principles, and, when requisite, expose the reasonings and practices of their Baptist brethren. And surely this should not offend them, even when the same freedom of speech is used by others which they claim for themselves.

P R E F A C E

TO

T H E S E C O N D E D I T I O N.

THE rapid sale of the first large Edition of the “Confessions,” and the numerous demands for it since then which the Publisher has been unable to satisfy, justify the author, at first in the preparation, and now in the re-issue of the volume. It was penned under the conviction that such a work was necessary, and with the hope that it might be useful. This conviction has been confirmed—this hope realized—by the result.

The writer’s purpose was—by rebuking the narrow spirit, and exposing the shallow sophisms, of the class of bigoted Baptists whom

he describes—to guard the young against their influence. This design it was impossible to accomplish, just because it was impossible to state facts and maintain truth without appearing to be uncharitable and severe. He is not surprised, therefore, that a few have censured his production. Many of them, however, have done so from inconsideration. They have overlooked the author's affirmation—that his descriptions applied not to *all* Baptists, but merely to a *class* of them. No denomination numbers amongst its members wiser or worthier men; but these men know how many there are bearing the same name whose spirit and tactics are truthfully portrayed in the following pages. Such estimable persons, with a few Pædo-baptists, who live in large towns and in pleasant fellowship with a select circle of the most intelligent and liberal-minded of the various Christian denominations, may deem the sketches inaccurate, or the reasonings needless, which form a large portion of this volume. But a few months' sojourn in some of our rural districts or small towns would correct their mistake, and effec-

tually cure them of their misapplied charity. Were they to witness the unworthy arts to which small-minded zealots for “much water” resort, in order to gain from the young and uninstructed a proselyte to their sect, they would not condemn but commend the man who should expose artifices so dishonourable to the denomination they were designed to enlarge, and so calculated to injure the cause of Christ.

But the author is aware that his work is not mere narration. It is throughout argumentative. And though he acquits the more respectable Baptists of the *spirit* which he has exposed, he is aware that many of them, in common with inferior men, rely upon some, at least, of the reasonings which he has refuted. At this he may marvel, but he has no disposition to do more. How some Baptists can be satisfied with the support they derive to their system from many of their arguments which are answered in the “Confessions,” he knows not. They may think the Pædo-baptists “weak brethren,” as too many of

them profess to do; but such brethren can comfort themselves with the thought that, weak as they are, they are strong enough to stand against, and to scatter to the winds, sophisms of those who smile with self-complacency at their folly.

CONFessions OF A CONVERT.

PART I.

DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES.

My parents were pious, but Baptists of the straitest sect. This even a stranger would very soon discover, but their children knew it right well. I can trace amongst my very earliest impressions the idea that it was very wrong to sprinkle babies, and that the ministers who did so were very foolish or very naughty men. I do not think, indeed, that my worthy father and mother ever told me this in so many words; but I am persuaded that they, and others who attended our meeting, believed as much; and I well remember hearing them speak of Pæd, Baptists as “weak

brethren," labouring under a dangerous delusion. I am convinced, however, that my parents, who were in other respects very kind and charitable, would never have spoken as they did against their fellow-Christians, had not our minister set them the bad example. He was a little man, and rather corpulent; with a stiff gait, a pompous air, a round and rubicund face, and a very loud voice. He had not been favoured with an academic education; but possessed considerable natural talent, was very confident that he knew what *baptizo* meant, and had been so diligent a student of Dr. Gill, and a few other divines of the same school, as to be well versed in the principal points of their rigid creed. It was his practice, when I was young, frequently "to smoke a pipe," as he phrased it, and to spend an evening at my father's house. These were visits in which I greatly rejoiced, because I was then generally allowed to "sit up to supper,"—a part of the entertainment with which I was much more edified, than I was with the grave conversation, for the sake of which I was kept out of my bed.

I cannot now recall much that I then heard, for the very good reason that I did not comprehend, and rarely regarded it; but I well recollect that the subject of immersion was generally introduced

and there were two passages of Scripture which were so frequently quoted— one about the “much water” of Ænon, and the other about Philip and the Eunuch “going down *into* the water and coming up *out of* the water”—that I think I should forget my name sooner than I should forget them. I also retain very vividly the expression of our minister’s countenance, and the sudden change which would come over it, whenever “infant sprinkling” became the topic of remark. Often have I observed, in the midst of cheerful conversation, or even while he was facetious (as he could be), that no sooner was this subject suggested than his small laughing eyes shot fire, and his voice and mein assumed an unwonted, and, as I now think, an unnatural solemnity.

There were some other circumstances in connection with baptism which happened during my earlier years, and which have forcibly recurred to my thoughts since that subject began to engage my serious consideration. During this period death removed my youngest sister, and my parents were most painfully affected by this bereavement. The belief, however, that their departed babe had entered heaven afforded them much support; and they appeared to be especially consoled by the Saviour’s assurance that “of such

is the kingdom of heaven." At the time this seemed to me very natural; but I was not a little surprised, shortly afterwards, when an Independent, in a conversation with my father, quoted this same passage to prove that infants were suitable subjects for baptism, to hear him say that the words did not describe infants, but only adults, who resembled them in spirit. As the text had often been repeated to me when a child, and had long been a favourite, I was by no means pleased with my father's new application of it; and for this reason I was induced to pay more attention than I otherwise might have done to the reply of the visitor. He said, I well remember, that this could not be the meaning of our Lord, for two reasons. The first of these was, that the original word translated "of such" never meant in the New Testament "of those who are similar in character," but always of "those who are of the same kind or class." Of the correctness of this statement I could not then judge; but since I became more competent to examine it, I am fully convinced of its truth. The other objection, however, I could appreciate; for it was plain and convincing even to a child. It was this—that when the Saviour said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the

kingdom of heaven," he assigned in this latter declaration a reason, not for his receiving adults of a child-like disposition, but for receiving the children themselves. He then asked my father how he could suppose that one so wise as Jesus Christ, who spake as never man spake, could have ever conveyed such a sentiment as this, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, because men and women who, like them, are meek and humble, belong to my kingdom!'" What answer my good father returned to this reasoning I cannot recollect; but I know that, as the conversation only confirmed my earliest and sweetest impressions of these kind words, I was not a little pleased that the Independent had, as I thought, obtained the best of the argument. I also considered it rather strange that, although my parents believed that Jesus Christ loved my little sister, that he would have taken her in his arms had he been on earth, and that he had actually received her spirit into heaven, they nevertheless refused to present her to God in baptism, as my pious uncle and aunt presented my cousins.

Shortly after entering upon the twentieth year of my age, it pleased God, I trust, to discover to me the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and to awaken in my soul an intense desire after salvation.

Most deeply did I then feel that one thing demanded my care, and that it became me to seek this with my whole heart. Ordinary pursuits had lost their power to please. Old things had passed away. Truths, with which I had been theoretically acquainted from my childhood, now came to my thoughts with all the freshness and force of an immediate revelation from heaven. Exercises, in which I had been wont to engage from constraint or custom, were now my comfort and my choice. To me no spots were so attractive as the sanctuary, and the secret place of prayer; and no conversation refreshing, or indeed at all congenial with my state of mind, but such as referred to the great truths and spiritual blessings of the gospel. The serious reader may, therefore, imagine that I felt less interest than ever in the frequent recurrence of the threadbare subject of immersion, which continued to be one of the most common topics of discourse when Mr. B., our minister, spent an evening at our house. Indeed, I think about that period more was said on the subject than usual, because a new minister had just been ordained at the Independent chapel, whose preaching had drawn numbers to the place, and amongst them a few from our own congregation. Having sufficient spiritual discernment to

discover that there was a better baptism than that of water, and being much impressed with the solemn conviction, that “neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,” I began literally to loathe the trite theme of which I heard so much, though rarely anything that was either useful or new. This aversion was strengthened by the heavy condemnation which our pastor frequently pronounced upon those who sprinkled infants, and still more by the contemptuous and acrimonious tone in which it was sometimes uttered. As at that time my affections went freely forth towards all who loved the Saviour, these hard sayings and harsh censures grated most painfully upon my feelings; and more than once I withdrew from company in which I had not courage to speak, but scarcely knew how to be silent.

I remember being particularly displeased with the positive tone in which Mr. B. was accustomed to affirm, that all upon whom water was merely sprinkled or poured were unbaptized; and that to administer the ordinance to any except adult believers, was “will worship” and sinful superstition. As I knew several intelligent and serious Independents sufficiently well to be satisfied that they could not be chargeable with such

evils, and was confident, moreover, that their practice was as much the consequence of careful thought and conscientious conviction as that of their accuser, I not only shrunk from these uncharitable criminations, but, for the first time, I began to be conscious of an altered feeling towards their author. Assured that many upright Pædo-baptists “in these things served Christ,” as sincerely as their brethren, I concluded with the apostle Paul, that they were “acceptable to God,” and, therefore, that they ought to be “approved of men.”

For some time, as I have already intimated, I kept silence. Yet, although my lips were sealed, my thoughts were busy; and the conviction gradually grew up in my mind, and gathered strength from every recurrence of the subject, that my dear parents and their teacher were attaching to an outward rite a degree of importance unwarranted by Scripture; and that, in their zeal for a sign, they underrated, and sometimes overlooked, the thing signified.

But although I had hitherto kept the door of my lips, and many times under a strong inducement to speak, on one occasion my feelings broke through all restraints. The conversation had turned upon the case of a young lady in the neigh-

bouthood, who, it was supposed, sympathized with Baptist views, but had recently joined the Independent church. This led to some general and very strong remarks against Pædo-baptists, and their disregard of God's ordinance, which could only have been justifiable upon the supposition that they were doing this wilfully. I had often heard such observations before; but having that morning been reading the life of Philip Henry, whose views on the subject of infant baptism were so decided, and so influential, the revolting thought crossed my mind that, if Mr. B.'s remarks were well founded, this most eminent man, and many others who, though dead, are yet speaking by their writings and their works, must be utterly unworthy of that high place in the records and regard of the church in which their character and memory have been long enshrined. Under this impression, I ventured to ask Mr. B. whether a Christian man, who, after an honest, searching, and prayerful examination of the Scriptures, had come to the conclusion that it was his duty to dedicate his children to God by baptism, ought to disregard this conviction, or to follow it? At first he attempted, as I thought, to evade the question, and expressed some doubt whether just such a case could happen as I had supposed; but

when I mentioned the names of Owen, Baxter, Howe, Charnock, Watts, Doddridge, Whitefield, Wesley, and the Henrys, and referred to some of our Independent neighbours, whose praise was in all the surrounding churches, he rather shrunk from his uncharitable surmise, and said that it was not for him to sit in judgment upon them, and that to their own Master they must stand or fall. Not satisfied with this reply, I pressed my point, when he acknowledged that they must do what they deemed best. "Well, then," I added, "if they entertain the solemn conviction that God requires them thus to dedicate their children, is not this to observe the divine ordinance, to do that which is both good and acceptable,—in a word, to obey the baptismal command?" Without a moment's hesitation, he answered in the negative. "Tell me, then," I added, "what is *that* in the service which constitutes its *essence*, and which God chiefly regards? Is it *the mode* in which it is done, or the *spirit*?" He paused for a moment, and then began to speak about the signification of the original term. "That, sir," I replied, "is a point in dispute between Baptists and other Christian bodies, who, with at least equal integrity, ability, and learning, maintain that the word does not mean to immerse, just as

confidently as you contend that it does. Upon this question I cannot pronounce; but one thing appears to me perfectly plain, that whether the Greek word signifies dip, or sprinkle, or anything else, a correct conclusion respecting the meaning of a disputed term is a matter of very inferior importance to that upon which we are conversing. Can you believe," I added, "that a mere verbal mistake (supposing it to be one) would vitiate a service, most sincerely performed in accordance with what is verily believed to be the appointment of God? Do you think that the religious use of water, in the name of the Trinity, and in the spirit of obedience, is not regarded by the Saviour as the observance of his institution, simply and solely because the element is not employed in sufficient quantity, or applied in the most expressive mode? Can a slight error or informality neutralize, and render nugatory, what in all other respects would constitute a sacrifice such as must be well pleasing to God?"

In this strain I continued to speak with considerable warmth and fluency for some time, and the good minister sat gazing at me with mute amazement. At the close of my appeal, he simply said, "Ah! you are young yet, and you will, I hope, take a more scriptural view of the subject

as you grow older ;" and then he introduced another topic. I heard afterwards that, on the following morning, he remarked to my father's clerk, a prim and puritanical old gentleman, and a very strait-laced member of the church, that I "was not half a Baptist," and that he feared I "had been among the Independents."

The effect of this conversation upon my mind was considerable. Feeling as I then did the incalculable importance of what was spiritual in religion, my soul revolted from a system which seemed to me to invest the mere ceremonials of Christianity with a value of their own, distinct from the purpose they were intended to serve, and superior to that state of mind which God regards as of pre-eminent worth. And the longer I considered the subject, the stronger my conviction became that this was a natural consequence of Baptists making a single rite the point of union with each other, and of separation from the Universal Church. I thought, moreover, that I could trace the baleful influence of selecting so narrow a basis for their ecclesiastical system, far beyond the solitary effect which I had noticed.

But although I strongly disapproved of the opinions and spirit upon which I have been remarking, my conviction that adult immersion was

the most scriptural mode of baptism continued as yet unchanged. I say "conviction," but the word "impression" would more accurately describe my state of mind; for as I had neither read any defence of a different mode, nor carefully considered the subject, it amounted to little more. Upon this impression, however, I had been almost persuaded to act, and thus to connect myself with the church amongst whose members I had been brought up. More than once Mr. B. had pressed the duty upon my attention, and had urged me in the accustomed phraseology to "follow the Lord," by which he simply meant "be immersed." Many other kind friends also volunteered their advice and exhortations to the same effect; and why it was I know not, except from the hope that I should succeed to my honoured father's position, who was a deacon of the church, and what the good people called "a pillar of the place;" but there was certainly much effort employed to get me safely under the water.

Just at that time, however, a circumstance occurred which not only caused me to hesitate, but which gave my mind a new bias, and led me first to defer, and finally to decline the religious connection I was about to form. At our family worship one evening, my father read the third

chapter of Matthew, which describes the character and baptism of John; and while I listened, I was struck, as I never had been before, with the fifth verse, in which it is said, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized." As soon as the service was concluded, I re-opened the Bible; and having again read the words, "Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan," I exclaimed, "What an amazing multitude must John have baptized, and what an amount of time and labour must have been consumed in immersing them!" On the following day the same thought recurred; and having read the statement once more, I resolved, if it were possible, to ascertain the probable number of the baptized, and the time which must have been spent in such a service.

With this design, I consulted, in the first place, Josephus, a commentary, and two or three other books, for the purpose of ascertaining the population of Judea at the commencement of the Christian era. But greater difficulties than I had anticipated prevented me from obtaining that accurate information which I desired. One conclusion, however, appeared to me incontrovertible,—that, at the lowest calculation, the number

could not have been less than a million and a half. What proportion of these might have been baptized could, of course, be only a matter of conjecture; but when I considered the great popularity of John, and the strong and universal terms by which the numbers are described, I was convinced that the total could not be less than one-third of the people, nor under half a million.

Having satisfied myself upon this point, I proceeded to compute the period which must have been consumed in their immersion. From having frequently witnessed the process, I knew that baptism by this mode could not be administered to an individual, with suitable deliberation and gravity, in less time than two minutes, and, with the utmost despatch consistent with decorum, that more than thirty could not be immersed in an hour. Assuming this to be the average rate at which John performed the service, and supposing that he thus spent ten hours of every day, I was conducted to the conclusion that he might baptize two thousand weekly, or about one hundred thousand in a year; from which it was evident that, had he spent no part of this time in travelling, preaching, or other employments, but continued almost without intermission in the water,

he must have devoted five years of labour to this single work! I was confounded at the result of this calculation; for I knew, from previous thought and reading, that his public ministry could not have exceeded a year, and was probably restricted to a still shorter period.

This inquiry shook my previous faith in the divine authority of immersion; and it also recalled to my recollection a conversation I had heard, a few months before, between my uncle and my father on the subject of John's baptism, in which the question was proposed, whether, supposing that John's disciples were immersed, they submitted to this process in their usual dress or naked,—or, if not, whether they had brought changes of raiment with them for the purpose, and had constructed sheds, or pitched tents on the banks of the river, in which they could privately prepare for the service. My excellent parent perceived the difficulty in which he would be involved by adopting either of these hypotheses; and therefore like the Pharisees, when pressed with another perplexing question respecting the same baptism, he prudently replied that he could not tell. My uncle, however, would not be satisfied with this evasion, and proceeded to show that each of the suppositions was equally impro-

babble. He added, moreover, what struck me at the time, that as there must have been women as well as men who crowded to John's ministry, nothing could be more unlikely, more contrary to the usage of the country and the people, or more revolting to the feelings and habits of Eastern females, than to have consented to be publicly plunged by a man in the presence of a gazing multitude.

Shortly after this, Mr. B. called at my father's house ; and having pointedly asked me why I lingered on the threshold of the church, I deemed it my duty candidly to confess the perplexities in which my thoughts had been recently entangled. These, however, he ascribed to "carnal reasonings ;" and questioned whether such doubts had not come from the great deceiver. I did not feel very much flattered by these explanations of what I believed to be the sincere operations of an upright mind ; nor was I convinced, when he attempted to remove the doubts which I had suggested, and to settle the point for ever, by dogmatically declaring, whatever others might say to the contrary, that the word *baptizo* always meant to dip, and that therefore John could have administered the ordinance in no other way. I was the less satisfied with this summary mode of dis-

posing of my difficulties, because I was aware that my minister, notwithstanding the oracular style and sonorous tone in which he mouthed the term “baptizo,” was yet profoundly ignorant even of the Greek alphabet.

As I felt myself (though not altogether ignorant of the original language of the New Testament) nearly as much disqualified as my pastor for the settlement of a point upon which profound scholars differed, by any reference to Greek authors, I simply expressed my surprise that he should speak so confidently on the subject; and added, that “if the original word always meant what he had affirmed, one way by which his opinion might be tested, would be to translate every passage where it occurs in accordance with his theory.” By this process, I suggested, an unlearned reader, such as myself, (for I did not offend the worthy man by using the plural pronoun,) might form some idea of the fitness, at least, of such a signification. I proposed, therefore, that we should select a few passages, and substitute the words “dip” and “dipping” for “baptize” and “baptism.” To this he yielded his assent. But he did it so reluctantly as to convey the impression to my mind, that he was apprehensive the result would not be exactly what he de-

sired. I resolved, however, to apply the test; and having taken a concordance, I turned to several texts, and translated them in the new style. A few of these I remember, and will here repeat. "I indeed *dip* you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall *dip* you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." "John did *dip* in the wilderness, and preach the *dipping* of repentance." "I have a *dipping* to be *dipped* with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" "The *dipping* of John, was it from heaven or of men?" "The *dipping* which John preached." "And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye *dipped*? And they said, Unto John's *dipping*." "Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be *dipped* with the *dipping* that I am *dipped* with?" "Know ye not that so many of us as were *dipped* into Jesus Christ were *dipped* into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by *dipping* into death." "And were all *dipped* unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." "For by one Spirit are we all *dipped* into one body." "Else what shall they do who are *dipped* for the dead, if the dead rise not at

all? why are they then *dipped* for the dead?" "As many of you as have been *dipped* unto Christ have put on Christ."

As I thus read these passages, the conviction came upon me with irresistible force that the original term *could not* bear the meaning which the Baptists attempt to fasten upon it; and when I had concluded, I stared at the minister, and he stared at me. In this rather ludicrous position we sat for a short time; and finding that he did not, as I expected, break the silence, I ventured to ask him, whether he could believe that such translations correctly answered to the words of inspired wisdom, and whether they did not turn the solemn and sublime instructions of Scripture into sheer nonsense, or the grossest absurdity. To this he would not assent: when I begged him to explain to me the meaning of such expressions as "*dipped* with the Holy Ghost;" "*dipped* with fire;" "*dipped* into one spirit;" "*dipped* into death;" "*dipped* into Christ;" and "*preaching a dipping* of repentance." My request, however, was made in vain. The worthy pastor was evidently puzzled, though he would not confess it; and shortly afterwards he pleaded want of time, and took his departure, much preferring, as it appeared to me, the passage from the house into the

street, to any one of those which I had pointed out to him.

Mr. B., at the time of his visit, was evidently anxious that I should form one of a company of candidates for church fellowship, who were to be immersed about three weeks afterwards. He had also ventured prematurely to express his belief to several persons that I should be of the number. When, therefore, the reason of my hesitation transpired, it created much surprise and speculation. Many minds and many mouths were filled with sundry surmisings as to the real cause of this delay, few of which were charitable or correct. But another circumstance, which occurred at the same time, produced a still greater stir. Amongst the attendants at our chapel, there were two very intelligent and devout young ladies, who had three years before left the Established Church, in which they were brought up, because they could not profit by the preaching which they heard there. As their hearts and their income were large, and their habits inexpensive, their liberality was felt by a great number of the poor, and at public collections their contribution generally exceeded that of others. But their health was extremely delicate; and by most they were considered as destined to an early grave. One of them suffered

from an affection of the spine, and serious apprehensions were entertained that consumption had commenced its fatal course in the other. By the perusal of books in favour of immersion, with which they had been copiously supplied, together with the earnest persuasives of Mr. B., the sisters were brought to believe that it became them in this way to profess the gospel. As their diffidence, however, amounted almost to a disease, and they secluded themselves much from society, they suffered a long and severe mental conflict, before they could so far control their feelings as to submit to a ceremonial, which would expose them to what they deemed a most distressing publicity. But they were still more powerfully influenced by a fear, that the service in their case might prove as perilous as it was painful. Yet strong as these objections seemed, they had at length been silenced, partly by the confident manner in which they were assured by our minister that God would preserve them from all evil in the observance of his own ordinance, but principally by the conviction that this was a part of the cross which the Christian was commanded to carry. Although, therefore, their repugnance and apprehensions remained, a sense of duty preponderated.

But their feelings were spared, and their con-

sciences satisfied, by a striking, though, I believe, by no means a singular occurrence. About a month prior to their decision, a baptismal service had been performed at a small town a few miles from us; and amongst the immersed there was a young woman, at the time in apparently sound health, who caught a severe cold in the service, which speedily ran on to fever, delirium, and death. The cause was so evident, and the whole case so clear, that even the most contracted Baptists in our congregation (and there were those who seemed to think that God would actually work a miracle to counteract what, in some constitutions, would be the certain consequence of immersion,) were confounded; whilst others confessed that "it was a most mysterious providence." This circumstance came to the ears of the two sisters, and it affected them deeply. Their first step was to send for Mr. B.; but as he still assured them of their safety, without assigning, as they thought, any reason for such assurance, or producing a divine warrant to that effect, they were not satisfied; and therefore they wisely resolved to do what they now perceived ought to have been done before, viz., to consult their medical attendant on the subject. His judgment was very strong. He said it would be perilous in the extreme, and that

he knew scarcely any cause more calculated to quicken incipient disease and accelerate death. This decided them. Convinced that He who desireth mercy and not sacrifice, could not require them in such a way to hazard their lives, they wisely declined the service. As their case had created considerable interest, and their expected accession to the church was deemed of much importance, their withdrawal caused more commotion than even my delay.

What might have been the effect of this occurrence upon others I cannot state; but it suggested to my own mind a train of reflections which strengthened my previous suspicion, that immersion could not be the only proper mode of baptism. As far as I can now recall them, my thoughts ran in some such train as this. Christianity is a universal system. It is designed for the world. One of its distinguishing features, which is also one of the clearest evidences of its divine origin, is the exact and entire adaptation of its regulations and requirements to every community, class, and creature under heaven. To say the least, each of its doctrines, and promises, and injunctions, and institutions, is perfectly fitted to men of every clime, character, and condition. Whether they dwell in Iceland or Ethiopia, in the city or the wilderness,

amidst the sands of the desert or the springs of the valley, it ordains no service, and requires no observance, which may not be readily performed. It is not a religion of sacred places, set seasons, and costly sacrifices. Its ritual is simple, not severe—suited not to the healthy and robust alone, but also to the delicate woman and the man of gray hairs. And this interesting peculiarity of the whole scheme evidently belonged to the baptismal rite as practised in the primitive age. It could be administered in any place, or at any time. Wherever the apostles preached, there and then they could baptize. In the city or the desert, the house or the prison, it was equally and always easy. There was no difficulty, no delay, no exemption. Age caused no hesitation; health constituted no barrier. Friends were not alarmed; physicians were not consulted. The gloom of midnight was as favourable for its performance as the brightness of noon. Families could observe the rite on the very first hour of their hearing the gospel; and thousands, apparently without difficulty, on the very day, and probably in the very place of their conviction. All this appeared to me to agree well with the general adaptation of Christianity to man's changing circumstances, and with the opinion that baptism was administered

by the simple and easy method of sprinkling; but how to harmonize the views of Immersionists with either the genius of the gospel, or the practice of the primitive age, I could not discover.

I was also impressed with the contrast between this painful and most repulsive mode of baptizing, and the gentle and generous spirit which pervades and adorns the other requirements of Christianity. All these furnish a large and admirable commentary upon the declaration, "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." In this respect, its services are invested with a character essentially different from the rigid rites of Judaism. It insists upon no specific ritual. It prescribes no precise points or punctilios, the non-observance of which would vitiate our obedience to its general requirements. No pattern of the spiritual structure, such as Moses saw on Mount Sinai, was shown to Peter, or Paul, or John. No pains nor penalties are threatened for slight violations of the letter or rubric of a ceremonial institute. Much is left open. A large measure of liberty is conceded to the Christian. A generous confidence is reposed in the church. For public worship no precise form has been prescribed, so assured was the di-

vine Author of the gospel that he might safely leave such details to the enlightened and devout affections of his disciples. And even the solemn rite which was designed to "show the Lord's death till he come" is described in very general terms; and instead of being enjoined upon the conscience by authority and threatening, it is commended to the heart by the gentle and tender appeal, "This do in remembrance of me." And the other ordinance, baptism, could in my view be no exception to this rule. Indeed, I thought I perceived this, not merely in the perfect ease with which it was administered and received in apostolic times, but in the very indefiniteness of the original terms, and even in the disputes which have hence arisen amongst those who would be "wise above what is written,"—"servants," who certainly in this point are not "above their Lord."

I was much impressed with the conviction that, had immersion been essential, the law of baptism would have been promulgated in language widely different from what it is. We should then have had very minute directions, in words of no mere general, and certainly of no doubtful import. But this would have been as alien from the spirit of Christianity as it would be accordant with the principles of the Baptists.

For some time, these and similar reasonings suggested themselves to my thoughts ; and firmly believing in the suitableness of every Christian ordinance to the case of all nations, I one day resolved to consider whether this could be affirmed of immersion. I therefore took a map of the world, and viewed the subject in relation to some of its most important divisions.

One thing, at the outset of this inquiry, occurred to me, that whether immersion might or might not be adapted to the climate of the different regions of the earth, it certainly does not suit the customs of many of their inhabitants ; nor could it be generally practised, unless their social habits were completely changed. This is particularly the case with Eastern nations, by whom nothing would be deemed more indecent, or felt to be more revolting, than the public exposure of their wives and daughters, and their immersion by a man. And this very feeling, be it remembered, has been inherited from their ancestors, and existed in all its force when the apostles baptized in the very countries where it is still found. Strange, then, that a rite so offensive should have been practised with such ease ; and stranger still, that it should ever have been enjoined.

But the difficulty arising from climate seemed

to me more formidable than that produced by custom. Even in our own country, and other temperate regions upon which my eye rested as I looked over the map, I well knew that immersion was far from being so suitable and safe as might have been expected in any institution which the wise and gracious Saviour appointed to be universally observed. On the contrary, I was convinced that it was generally inconvenient, and frequently dangerous. I knew, from medical testimony, as well as my own reasoning, that in many cases where only a predisposition existed to cerebral or inflammatory affections, to congestion, to consumption, and to numerous other maladies, death could only be averted by miracle; and that to submit to such a service, where serious diseases had begun to develope themselves, would be madness, if not murder. Such would often be the consequence even during the months of summer, and much more amid the snows of winter.

I was well aware that in warmer regions, like Judea, the pain and peril which attend immersion under the clouds and cold of higher latitudes would be diminished. But in these countries, where the heat is frequently intense, and the drought all but universal, the scarcity and

value of the element, so much of which is requisite for immersing a multitude, presented a difficulty of another kind, hardly less formidable. Even in our own country, I knew what special provision, and sometimes protracted preparation, were requisite prior to such a service; and aware, from the statements of Oriental travellers, that few wants were more commonly or keenly felt by the inhabitants of the East than that of water, and that a quantity sufficient for immersion could in few situations be obtained without considerable cost and labour, I concluded that no appointment could well have been more unsuited to their circumstances. This I was assured, both from scriptural statements and from modern tourists, must have been the case in Judea, where the Jordan was the only river, and where, throughout a considerable portion of the year, the few narrow channels, occasionally filled with mountain torrents, or fed from intermitting springs, are entirely dry. I knew, moreover, that a solitary well supplied the city of Samaria; and that the springing up of a small fountain was the strong and frequently the sole reason for the encampment of armies, or the erection of towns. There were, indeed, baths in the dwellings of the opulent; but to suppose that the fishermen of

Galilee could command such expensive luxuries, or conduct their numerous converts from amongst the poor into the abodes of the wealthy and noble, for the purpose of turning their baths into baptisteries, is one of those incredible and monstrously absurd imaginations to which none would resort, but those who were driven by truth and reason from the fair field of fact and argument. Such reflections confirmed my previous conviction, that dipping does not accord with a religion designed to be universal, and cannot be the baptism which Jesus Christ instituted for "all nations."

Even to entertain the question, whether immersion was adapted to Greenland, Iceland, Siberia, and similar lands, where, during much of the year, water is obtainable in small quantities, and merely for common use, only by dissolving ice or snow, seemed most absurd. I was convinced that it could not be a question, and that of all possible modes this would be the most difficult and unsuitable. The suggestion pressed itself upon my mind that, instead of possessing the fitness which characterizes and commends all God's arrangements, and forms so marked a feature of the gospel, had the great Author of this institution designed to encumber it, and render its observance

inconvenient, painful, perilous, and, in many situations, impracticable, dipping was the very mode which he would have enjoined.

These, and other topics connected with baptism, engaged much of my attention at this time; for I not only felt the necessity of thoroughly examining the subject, but found myself placed by the importunities and displeasure of several Baptist friends on the defensive, and therefore compelled to give a reason for the hesitation I had discovered. I was also plentifully supplied with books and tracts in favour of immersion, which, in courtesy no less than from inclination, I carefully perused. Their only result, however, was to suggest new objections to the mode, and to establish me in the belief that the common arguments in its favour were the weakest sophisms, and that there was not a text of Scripture which rendered it the least support.

PART II.

REMINISCENCES AND REFLECTIONS.

ALTHOUGH, in consequence of the withdrawal of myself, and of the young ladies referred to in a preceding page, the number of candidates had been reduced, the public baptism of the remainder was not deferred. On that occasion I of course, occupied my accustomed place in our chapel; but frequently as I had attended similar services, I had never witnessed one with similar feelings. My recent reflections, and my peculiar circumstances, had invested the performance, and everything relating to it, with unusual interest. When I had been a spectator of such proceedings before, I had surveyed them with a somewhat easy and passive acquiescence. Taught from my childhood to regard the performance as scriptural, I had never dared to criticise its character, or to question its propriety. And yet some vivid and enduring impressions had been left upon my mind by these services, which certainly were not much

calculated to foster those serious feelings with which everything sacred should be regarded. During my childhood and youth, public immersions were simply, but very specially, amusing to me. Most vividly do the feelings still recur, (and had I been a Baptist, I am sure they would have blended painfully with better thoughts,) which arose high in my little heart, when my father lifted me up in his arms, or stood me upon the seat, to see the people go down into the baptistery, and to watch Mr. B. (which I did "with all my eyes") as he took hold of them one after another, and "pushed them," as I was then accustomed to describe it, "right under the water." But although the entire spectacle was interesting, on one or two of these occasions there were some circumstances which specially *impressed* me, and somewhat heightened the sort of holiday feeling with which I enjoyed them. One of these was the shrill scream of a woman, as she felt herself going under the water. Another was the struggling of a young person, who succeeded in wrenching herself from the minister's grasp, and fell with a loud splash into the baptistery. More than once, I recollect that persons fainted in the water; and I distinctly retain the image of the ghastly and death-like countenance of a wo-

man, as her head hung back, wet and motionless, over the arm of the person who dragged her into the vestry. At another time, in an oblivious moment, I actually burst out into a loud laugh, and clapped my little hands with unutterable delight, (for which, however, I was instantly deposed from my elevated standing-place, and sent to bed as soon as I reached home,) to see Mr. B., who, as I have said, was a short, stiff, portly person, lose his balance and his footing, while attempting to immerse a man twice his own bulk, and himself fall sideways, and with no small stir and splutter, into the water

But these juvenile reminiscences, and the apathy which had succeeded them as I grew older, were now supplanted by a disposition to survey the scene as an unbiassed spectator, and to ascertain, if possible, the impression which it was calculated to make upon pious strangers, or the unconverted world.

There was another cause which gave a peculiarity to my state of mind on this occasion. I knew that, in consequence of the circumstances narrated, the service was deemed extraordinary, and that during it many thoughts would be turned towards me, and strong desires cherished that by

the discourse which was then to be delivered, I might be either confounded or convinced.

It is the common custom for two ministers to be engaged at these services; one to preach, and the other to baptize. This arrangement is intended, I believe, to preserve the preacher, after he has heated himself by his advocacy of much water, (and on few occasions does his blood rise so near to the boiling point,) from the extreme danger of immediately descending from the pulpit to the pool. And no one can question the prudence of this division of labour, especially for the sake of such short-necked, apoplectic subjects as Mr. B. But, however discreet, it is difficult to reconcile its necessity, either with the wisdom of Him who commanded his disciples to "*teach all nations, baptizing them;*" or with the fact, that neither John at the Jordan, nor the apostles on the day of Pentecost, who both preached and baptized during one service, and who did not possess the modern and luxurious preservatives of Mackintosh overalls and mud boots, needed any such security against disease,—a circumstance which makes one shrewdly suspect that *their* mode of baptism and that of the Immersionists do not agree.

The minister who had been engaged to occupy the pulpit on this occasion was extremely popular in his own denomination, and was deemed the most powerful advocate of their peculiarities in that part of the country. He was well known in our town, and much admired by our congregation. Whenever he visited us, our chapel was crowded ; and in general his sermons were powerfully impressive. But I was not singular in the opinion that he had been solicited to take a part in this service, not so much on account of his general solemnity, as of his controversial skill. And it was very currently reported that he was called in specially to demolish the objections which I was known to entertain to immersion ; and by some it was most confidently predicted that I should be made ashamed of them, and of myself.

These rumours had reached my ear, but they did not disturb me. I was thoroughly open to conviction, and fully prepared to retrace my steps, and submit to immersion, whenever scriptural reasons for it were advanced. Nor, although I considered the references too pointed, and not in good taste, did I fail to join in the petition, which was more than once repeated during the prayer before the sermon, that what was about to be advanced from the pulpit might “convince the gain-

sayers, confirm the wavering, and remove all prejudice against the ordinances of the Lord!" I could also adopt the supplications then presented, though I could not sympathize with what I feared to be the spirit and design by which they were dictated, "that the enemies of the truth might not be permitted to scatter tares amongst the wheat, that objectors might renounce their carnal reasonings, and that timid disciples might no longer consult flesh and blood by following the Lord afar off."

I thought, moreover, that the hymn which was sung after the prayer had been selected with a similar reference to local circumstances. It was the 447th of Dr. Rippon's selection,—a part of which contains a very strange accommodation to adult immersion of the words "Hinder me not;" which were addressed by Abraham's servant to the relatives of Rebecca, when they said to him, "Let the damsel abide with us a few days." One verse especially seemed to me a most unwarrantable misappropriation of a solemn sentiment, and of the Saviour's example, to a doubtful and disputed form,—

"Through floods and flames, if Jesus lead,
I'll follow where he goes:
'Hinder me not,' shall be my cry,
Though earth and hell oppose."

Probably I might not have noticed this verse so much, had it not been read in an unusually high pitch of voice, and attracted towards myself the furtive glances of several, who evidently thought that I ought to be confounded by it.

When the preacher, arose all eyes were fastened upon him, and a remarkable stillness was maintained while he announced his text. It was from Ephesians, iv. 5,—“One baptism.” And I well remember that, as he read it the first time, he gave a very singular and significant emphasis to the word “*one*,” and accompanied the utterance with an expressive glance of his eyes, and a peculiar shake of the head, which were evidently intended to convey to us the preacher’s full belief that this passage settled the whole controversy. This kind of oratory was varied when he repeated the text. He then paused after the word “*one*” for several seconds; and during this hiatus turned himself to each gallery, and locked down upon the area of the place, bestowing, as I thought, more attention to our pew than it deserved, as if to defy all gainsayers; and concluded by bringing out with full force the word “*baptism*.” I never read the passage, and never shall, without the recurrence of that scene, and the recollection of

Mr. R.'s long-drawn utterance of "one——baptism."

Having up to this period of my life attached but one meaning to the word "baptism," in nearly all the passages of Scripture which contain it, it did not then occur to me that in this place it referred to a unity of spirit, not of form, and that the entire fabric of the preacher's argumentation rested upon a misinterpretation of his text. But although at the time, partly from my own inconsideration, and partly from the caution with which the preacher avoided all allusion to a diversity of sentiment on the point, I yielded my mind to his assumption, I have seen since then that it was without the shadow of a proof. Standing as these words do in the very centre of a paragraph which describes the essentials of Christian unity, and surrounded by numerous references, all of which are purely spiritual, it would be exceedingly strange if they designated nothing beyond a rite; and still more so, if they are to be limited, as the preacher's reasoning assumed, to the mere mode in which such a rite should be administered. Repeatedly in his sermon did he take the liberty of reciting the passage as if it had been written "one immersion;" which, though not without precedent in his own

denomination, was a most disingenuous and unwarrantable artifice, in a discourse designed professedly to prove the very point which was thus taken for granted. I am not sure, however, whether the preacher by so doing did not unwittingly expose the inconsistency of his own version. At least I believe that this *would* have been its effect, had he not confined the quotation to the single clause thus torn from its context, and had honestly read the entire passage thus,—“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one *dipping*. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” A more incongruous juxtaposition it is scarcely possible to conceive. Neither logic nor learning can be necessary to make this apparent. “The plain reader” (so often appealed to and imposed upon by Baptists) may in such a case be confidently constituted a judge. Piety, no less than reason, revolts from a rendering of a passage by which the unity of its parts is so strangely violated, and an importance attached to the mode of administering an outward ordinance, which agrees no better with its design than it does with the essential verities named in the

same sentence, and with the spiritual dispensation whose vital truths are set forth therein. On the other hand, no conjunction of parts could have been more harmonious or beautiful, if the “one baptism” spoken of be not an outward service, but an inward sanctification,—that baptism of the Spirit which “saves us,” and which the apostle Peter affirms to be “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh,” a mere ceremonial cleansing, “but the answer of a good conscience towards God.”

Before proceeding with my narrative, I may be permitted to make the remark, that neither on this nor on any other public occasion do I remember to have heard the words “dip,” and “dipping,” and “dippers” applied to Baptists and their mode of baptizing. They affirm, and that most truly, that the Scripture terms are not translated from the Greek, but simply transferred; and to such a mere transference they are so strongly opposed, that solely because the Committee of the Bible Society will not appropriate the sacred money entrusted to their hands for the printing of versions of the Scriptures, in which the original is so rendered as to sanction their mode of baptizing, they have formed for this purpose a separate institution. But why do they not con-

stantly abide by this principle, and consistently substitute for "baptize" and "Baptist" the words "dip" and "dipper?" Why do they not preach, and write, and change the phraseology of the English Bible, in accordance with the reasons of their withdrawal from the Bible Society? Why should the transferred expressions be excluded from the language of the Hindu, and retained in that of the Briton? Why should they shrink from the honest course of renouncing all ambiguous terms? Were they thus to act, they would never more speak of "*baptisms*," but of "*dippings*;" nor would they call themselves Baptists, but Dippers. No longer should we hear of Baptist Chapels, Baptist Unions, Baptist Anniversaries, Baptist Publications, Baptist Magazines, Baptist Children's Magazines, and Baptist Missions; but, in their stead, we should have the true English and *far more* accurate phrases of Dipping Chapels, Dipping Unions, Dipping Anniversaries, Dipping Publications, Dipping Magazines, Dipping Children's Magazines, and Dipping Missions.

And why should they not thus correct their customary phraseology? If, as Dr. Carson oracularly affirms, and as many have maintained before him, the original word *baptizo* means to dip, and nothing else, what objection can those who adopt

this opinion fairly urge against the change? I know of none except this—that it would demonstrate the folly of their positive assertions, and expose themselves to the loud laugh of impartial men. And of this their avoidance of the only words which accurately describe their practice is a sufficient evidence. They know well that an “improved version” of the New Testament could not be made rigidly on their principles, without rendering many portions of it unintelligible or absurd.

But it may be said that if the words “dip” and “dipping” be generally eschewed, Baptist preachers and writers frequently employ the terms “immerse” and “immersion,” and that this is all the same thing. I am aware that such a practice is common; and I know, moreover, that these expressions are often so introduced as to lead the unthinking to conclude that they answer both to the original of the New Testament and to the mode adopted by the Baptists! I do not assert, indeed, for I do not believe, that this is done with a design to mislead; but that such is the *effect* of using the word “immersion,” I am quite sure. Is it right, therefore, to inquire whether its signification is “all the same” as that of dipping? Every one knows that to “dip” is to plunge any-

thing under water, and almost immediately afterwards to take it out again,—that it includes a double action, and therefore describes most accurately the mode chosen by Baptists. But it is otherwise with the verb “to immerse.” This term is compounded of two Latin words, which severally mean “in” and “plunge;” the former being prefixed to the latter to strengthen the idea which it conveys. And, according to Dr. Johnson, it simply means “to put under the water; to cover deep.” Unlike “dip,” it does not include nor imply the additional act of drawing out of the water that which has just before been put under it; but its signification is restricted to the single operation of covering, or “sinking deep.” It would be applicable to the mode which the Baptists adopt, *if* they simply put their proselytes *beneath* the water, and left them there; if they merely “buried them in baptism,” but then abandoned them “to rise again” as best they could. The word, therefore, is inaccurately applied to their performance: it only describes half of it; and it usurps the place of a plainer term, which includes the whole, and which is, of all expressions, the most suitable and exact which the English tongue supplies. This word “immersion,” moreover, is as much transferred from the Latin

as ‘baptism’ is from the Greek; but it is recommended by a sort of cloudiness—a convenient ambiguity, which mystifies the uneducated mind, and hides the absurdity of translations and actions, which would be instantly seen were the plain word “dipping” put in its place.

But I must return to the sermon. After a short introduction, in which the preacher designated his own denomination “the despised Baptists,” and expressed his perfect willingness to bear the reproach of men, in humble words indeed, but with ill-disguised bitterness of spirit and contempt of those who thus regarded them, he proposed,—I. To offer some observations on the positive institutions of the gospel; II. To establish the claim of believers’ immersion to that character; and, III. To meet the objections of those who shrank from its observance. Having, under the first division of his discourse, pointed out the distinction between moral laws and positive institutions, and made some general remarks upon the importance of the latter, Mr. R. proceeded to prove their permanent obligation, and the consequent duty of every believer to observe them. In all this there was nothing to which I could object, and little which any Christians (with the exception of the Quakers) would have ques-

tioned. But yet the antagonistic manner and argumentative tone of the preacher were peculiarly fitted to make a different impression, and to lead the ignorant to suppose that other denominations held and acted upon very different principles. This, indeed, he did not assert, and, I believe, did not design ; but had he done both, he would not, I am persuaded, have succeeded much better in convincing his hearers that on these points, "they were the people, and that wisdom would die with them." Throughout, he delivered his sentiments as one having authority to speak on these subjects, and more than once he referred to the Immersionists, in a style singularly suited to convey the idea that they, if not the very pillar and ground of the truth, were certainly "set," in a very peculiar and public manner, "for the defence and confirmation of the gospel."

When the preacher announced the second head of his sermon, the manner in which he drew up his stately person, and compressed his eye-brows and lips, made it evident to me that he thought himself well prepared to advance something very convincing, and that he wished his audience to understand that he was about to scatter all his adversaries, and conduct his argument to a triumphant conclusion. And this feeling was evidently

contagious. Upon the announcement being made by Mr. R. that he would *prove* believers' immersion to be a positive institution of the gospel, there was a simultaneous and sympathetic stir throughout the chapel, and a confused noise created by various efforts to prepare for what was coming—some comfortably adjusting their persons on the seats; others shuffling the stools and hassocks, to secure an easy posture for their extremities; and not a few coughing when they did not need it, to prevent the interruption and save the trouble when they did. But the moment the preacher opened his lips, the sound of his voice stilled the temporary tumult, and hushed the audience into breathless silence. Nor was I the least attentive of his hearers. Not, indeed, that I expected any thing properly original; for I had so frequently heard and read what is usually advanced in favour of immersion, as to be perfectly familiar with, and heartily weary of, the flimsy fallacies, the spider's web, by which the un instructed and undiscerning are entangled and secured. Yet I did anticipate, from the reputation of the preacher as a polemic, and the confident tone in which he announced his design, that old reasonings on the subject would be reproduced with new force, or in new forms. But in this I

was doomed to disappointment. Nothing could have been more trite than the bold assertions, and nothing more customary than the convenient omissions, of his discourse.

He commenced by saying that the proposition he was about to prove would be considered under two heads: in the first place, he would show that none but believers were the proper subjects of baptism; and, secondly, that all who sustained such a character should be *immersed*.

The remarks in support of the first point were brief and declamatory. They consisted mainly in strong denunciations of infant sprinkling, and in fervid, if they were not feigned, exclamations of astonishment that any Christian could differ on this subject from himself. As my attention, hitherto, had been almost exclusively restricted to the mode of baptism, and the question, Who are its proper subjects? had but very casually occupied my thoughts, I was not then prepared to controvert the preacher's conclusion, although there was nothing advanced by him which appeared to me to have much weight, and some statements I could have easily disproved. In truth, there was only one topic upon which he dilated at any length,—the incapacity of infants to understand the ordinance, and the absurdity of

administering it to them. But upon this point he declaimed with much strength of voice and energy of manner. Again and again he affirmed that no single child had ever been the better for baptism, challenged all the Pædo-baptists in the world to deny his assertion, and, with most contemptuous tones, denounced the practice and its abettors. All this jarred harshly upon my feelings; and instead of producing conviction, it only excited disgust. It was an appeal, not to reason, but to passion; and its tendency was not to remove the doubts of the ingenuous inquirer, but to confirm the prejudices of the narrow-minded partisan. And I thought I could discern, during the delivery of some of his strongest denunciations, decisive evidence of this in the demeanour of several around me. Some of those who had risen from their seats stood gazing intently upon the preacher, and might be seen, at the conclusion of each ejaculation and appeal, giving their heads an emphatic jerk of approbation. Over the features of others there played a grim smile of satisfaction, which in a few cases became ghastly, from the unnatural contrast which an effort to seem pleased presented with their crimped-up cheeks, corrugated upper lip, and cadaverous countenance: whilst there were a few from whose

eyes there flashed the gleams of an unhallowed fire, which the preacher's words had kindled in their hearts.

These various signs of emotion strongly attracted my attention; and as I then took a considerable interest in the congregation, and was zealous for their reputation, I rejoiced to think that but few of our Independent friends were present to hear and see such a display of uncharitableness.

Much, however, as these objects occupied my thoughts, I was not so engrossed as to allow what might be termed the argument of this part of the discourse to pass unnoticed. Although I had had few opportunities of observing the influence of infant baptism, I had both heard and read enough to convince me that the preacher's dogmatic denunciations of its inutility would be firmly denied by his brethren, and that his demand of proof would be readily responded to. I perceived, moreover, that such an objection involved a gross fallacy; for it assumed that no advantage whatever could accrue from the ordinance, unless at the time of its administration the infant understood its design: whereas it must be obvious at a glance, that if the *parents* rightly discern the truth taught in relation to their child,

and feel the obligations which they solemnly acknowledge when they thus dedicate it to the Lord, the subsequent influence, both upon themselves and upon their youthful charge, must be in the highest degree important.

This, however, was only a passing idea; but in subsequent reflections upon this sermon, I was strongly impressed with the conviction that the preacher's statements not only involved an empty fallacy, but a heavy imputation upon the God of Abraham and the Saviour of mankind. I saw that the condemnation pronounced upon the *baptism* of infants, solely because they could not comprehend its design, would, if it were just, equally apply to the *circumcision* of infants by the father of the faithful, and the *blessing* of infants by Jesus Christ. More than once during his sermon Mr. R. exclaimed, "How absurd to *sprinkle* an unconscious babe!" And since then I have asked myself why, for the selfsame reason, it might not also be said, "How absurd to *circumcise* an unconscious babe!" "How absurd to *bless* it!" Surely the Jewish children of eight days old, and the infants enfolded in the arms of Jesus, were as "unconscious" of the design of the service performed upon them as are those who are now baptized. But were such services "absurd?" They

must have been so upon Mr. R.'s rule of judgment. Such a fearful condemnation of an ordinance and an act, which all acknowledge to have been "divinely wise," was unquestionably involved in his reasoning; and I should have been the more impressed with the manifest inconsistency between this mode of deciding a controversy, and the loud professions of reverence for Scripture with which Mr. R.'s sermon abounded, had I not been shocked by its still grosser impiety.

But although the preacher's declamation against infant baptism was brief, the young women who composed the bulk of his audience deemed it, I doubt not, quite decisive of the question, or, to quote the words of one of them, "particularly good." Mr. R.'s main purpose, however, was evidently to meet local circumstances, by proving that immersion alone is Christian baptism. To this, therefore, he devoted a considerable portion of his discourse. And whatever else might be defective in the maintenance of his point, there was no lack of zeal. Rarely has so cold a subject generated so much heat. The tongue, the fist, and the foot each performed its part. With stentorian voice and emphatic stamp, and heavy blows upon the Bible, if not 'with start and stare

theatric," he strove to make his words impressive. His entire manner reminded me of the practice of those savage tribes, who, when engaged in battle, endeavour, by violent gesticulations and horrid clamour, to paralyse or scatter the foes whom they cannot otherwise subdue. And, undoubtedly, if strong positions in reasoning, like fortified places, could be won by assault, or carried by storm, the preacher's victory would have been most complete.

The substance of Mr. R.'s reasoning on immersion will appear in the next part. I shall, therefore, only add here, that as he advanced no argument which I had not previously weighed, my views at the conclusion of his discourse continued much the same as they were at its commencement. But not so my feelings. These had been most painfully excited by what was advanced under the third head of the sermon, where the preacher proposed to remove the difficulties and reply to the objections of those who did not submit to immersion. Here I naturally expected something, at least, like a statement of the reasonings which restrained the great majority of Christians from practising this mode of baptism. But I was once more subjected to disappointment. *Moral* difficulties, not *mental*, were the *only* ones which the

preacher deemed it just or wise to dispose of, or even to name. No person, had he been ignorant of the fact that there were in the world Christians as intelligent and upright as the Baptists, who, after most careful consideration, conscientiously differed from them, could have learned, or would have imagined it, from Mr. R.'s remarks. On the contrary, their tendency was to make this single impression, that whilst in theory others agreed with himself, in practice they conferred with flesh and blood. One class was described as shrinking from an admitted obligation, because it was a painful cross; another, because they were too weak in faith to believe that God would preserve them in the observance of his own ordinance. Some were represented as standing aloof, on the ground that immersion was not essential to salvation; and not a few because they were too proud to join so small and despised a community as the Baptists. Many strong things were said upon this last point, and in such a tone as to satisfy me that the preacher had really much more exalted notions of his sect than he professed to have; but I cannot be sure that I correctly report this part of his sermon, for during its delivery my thoughts were diverted, and my seriousness disturbed, by an occurrence of the previous week, which it recalled to my mind.

Meeting one of our old church members—a weak but worthy individual—he thus accosted me:—“ Well, young man, I am sorry to hear that you shrink from the water; but ah! I remember doing the same thing myself for a long time, and I thought that there was nothing at all in the Bible about dipping; but I’ll tell you how I learned the truth. One day, when I was walking by a river, these words came to me, just as if any person was speaking into my ear,—‘ Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom;’ and I said to myself, ‘ Now this little flock must be the Baptists!’ for in our town there was no flock so small as they were. I am sure then that they must be right, and I won’t resist the truth any longer. So I went to the Baptist minister, and asked him about it; and he said it was quite correct, and that I ought to go under the water.”

The conclusion of the sermon contained an earnest appeal to waverers, and sundry reasons for laying aside every objection, and submitting to “ the Lord’s appointment;” and immediately afterwards seven persons were immersed—six young females and one man. Most of these I knew, and I had a favourable impression of their sincerity. Of one thing, indeed, I was sure—that prior to

their baptism, they had been subjected by our minister to several examinations as to their religious opinions and history; that they had also been conversed with by two of the deacons; and, after all, they had been compelled to pass through the fiery ordeal of appearing personally before the church, and "giving in their experience," as it is termed—that is, standing up in the face of the people, and telling them what they had thought and felt on the subject of their soul's salvation.

Of the service itself I shall say but little. To some such an exhibition may seem decent, wise, significant, and even solemn; but with such impressions I have no sympathy. While I looked at the young women, standing on the margin of the pool, decked out in decorated caps, and white vestments, far more tastily arranged than simple convenience required, and marked the manner in which they were severally plunged by the minister, and then, as my eye followed each of them, drenched and dripping (a spectacle anything but impressive), from the baptistery to the vestry, where I knew that the very necessary, but very unapostolical luxuries of brandy, fire, and changes of raiment awaited them, I said to myself, "Can this be Christianity?"

On leaving the chapel, instead of returning

home, as I had been wont to do immediately after each service, I yielded to an irrepressible desire to seek shelter in some shady retreat, where, unobserved, I might review the scene I had just witnessed, and indulge the thoughts which confusedly crowded into my mind. Constrained by this feeling, and too much engrossed with my own reflections to regard appearances, or care about the speculations and surmises which so unusual a course would call forth, I bent my steps towards the nearest egress from the town, and sauntered into a narrow and lovely lane, which terminated in an open glade, whither from my childhood I had loved to wander in search of the wood-flowers, which flourished there in great variety. It was about the middle of May: the noon was clear and bright, and the air fresh but balmy. I seated myself upon the trunk of a noble oak, which had just been felled; and, although the scenery around me was simple and familiar, never before did I survey it with such pure enjoyment, or drink in with so keen a satisfaction the sweet influences of nature with which my senses and my spirit were regaled. Just escaped from the close and noxious atmosphere of a confined sectarianism, into an immediate contact with which my thoughts had been so painfully forced during the previous morning,

I experienced an elation and elasticity of soul not to be described, and rejoiced with more than ordinary exultation in the liberty wherewith Christ had made me free. I felt that in *that* place I could have fellowship with God. Here, around, above, beneath, I read his character, and could realize his presence. The pure, deep æther, the soft yet bracing air, the cloudless sun and cheering light, the fresh fragrance of the hedge-rows, the sweet sound of blithe birds and murmuring breezes among the branches ; indeed, the entire scene which surrounded me suggested no sentiments but such as were hallowed and elevated, nor would it blend with any others. This conviction was forced upon me. Repeatedly did I recur to the service of the morning, and endeavour to fix my roving and reluctant thoughts upon some part of the discourse which I had been hearing ; but the effort proved vain. My mind was predisposed by the objects before me only for much higher exercises ; and I felt that to turn from them to the dissection of sophistries, and the discussion of topics so insignificant as those which had exercised the utmost vigour of the preacher's mind, and the full compass of his voice, would be to descend from heaven to earth, and almost to desecrate the glorious temple of the Creator, which his own hand had reared around me.

This impression was deepened when I took out my pocket-bible, and read in succession the 40th chapter of Isaiah, the 17th chapter of John's gospel, and the 12th and following chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. Here I felt that I had communion with the God who had stretched out the heavens and formed the earth. The noble, generous, sublime sentiments of the sacred page bore the impress of the same mind, and presented many of the same features as the natural scenery of the spot in which I sat. Their separate influences also perfectly harmonized. As the light and the air blended with each other, so did the teachings of the two books which I was then perusing. But neither of them agreed with the theme to which my thoughts had been directed. Here was nothing narrow—nothing little. The sentiments were sublime; the range of vision ample; the spirit generous and divine. Between the erect form and noble aspect of religion as here presented, and that cramped, and crippled, and creeping thing, the unnatural and ungainly motions of which I had that morning watched with shame and sorrow, I saw and felt that the difference was immeasurable. Most deeply did I then realize the truth, that as "high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's ways

above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts."

While I was musing thus, my attention was attracted towards a singular and stunted tree, which stood near the spot on which I was sitting. Its trunk was knotted and gnarled. Its branches were curiously twisted, and but scantily clothed with foliage; and in its general appearance it presented a very striking contrast to several noble elms and oaks which flourished around it. Curious to ascertain the cause of this difference, I left my seat, and proceeded to the spot where this deformed tree was growing, when the explanation immediately presented itself. On the one side, near a hedge, within a few feet of which it stood, a deep ditch had been dug, which, some years before, had severed some of its main roots, and cut off a large portion of its supplies; whilst on the other side there was a footpath, which had been much used when the tree was young, and had materially impaired its vigour. Here, thought I, do I see a true emblem of the system from which I had been so strongly repelled. Though, like this tree, planted in a large place, and in a fruitful soil, and possessing those essential truths, and that vital spirit, which *might* have secured its generous growth, its range has been restricted, its

roots impaired by man. The deep ditch of an exclusive creed, and the constant tramp of sectarian feet along its narrow pathway, have checked its growth, changed its form, covered what might have been a straight and sturdy trunk with unsightly excrescences, and left upon its crooked boughs but a sickly and scanty foliage.

PART III.

REASONINGS AND REPLIES

DURING the morning of the day after the service just described, I had occasion to be much in the town, and was not a little amused at the significant manner in which two or three attendants at our chapel, whom I happened to meet, eyed and addressed me. But my most formidable encounter of this kind occurred on my return home, where I found Mrs. B., our minister's wife, with her two daughters. They had evidently called for the purpose of ascertaining the impression which had been made by Mr. R.'s sermon ; and just as I opened the parlour door, I heard my mother, whose voice was usually mild and soft, exclaim with considerable animation, "No ! Mrs. B., I am *quite* sure that George is *sincere*!" Her face was flushed as I entered the room, and all the ladies appeared rather confused ; but, although I divined the cause, I did my best to put them at their ease. After the usual preliminaries, and without the slightest

reference to the subject, the worthy visitor suddenly turned towards me, and said, "Well, Mr George, and what did *you* think of the sermon yesterday morning? Your mind is settled *now*, I hope! Oh! dear, was it not convincing? What a wonderful man that Mr. R. is! Did you ever hear such arguments?" Unwilling to debate these points with the lady, of whose character I entertained a much higher estimate than of her judgment, and anxious not to disturb the complacent satisfaction which the preacher had afforded her, I endeavoured to evade the subject. But the attempt was vain. Determined to satisfy her curiosity, and attain the object of her call, she continued to assail me with interrogatives, until, in order to prevent any misconstruction of my silence, I was compelled to confess that I could not quite agree with the estimate she had formed of Mr. R., or his oration. No sooner had the words passed my lips, than both mother and daughters burst forth into a simultaneous and confused clash of tongues; and, from amidst the mass of broken ejaculations which they heaped upon my unfortunate head, all that I could distinctly hear, and that only because they were often repeated, were the words,—"Dear! I *am* surprised!" "Well!

it is sad!" "Ah! I *did* hope better things." "What *will* my poor husband say?"

As soon as the ladies had a little relieved themselves in this way, the worthy matron turned again to me, and said, "But, *Mr. George*, was n't the *Eunuch* baptized?" "Certainly, ma'am," I replied. "But was n't he *immersed*, I mean?" "I do not know that he was." "Dear me, Mr. George, why does n't it say so?" "Not that I am aware of, ma'am." "Well," she added, with uplifted eyes and hands, "I *am* surprised. Why, does n't it say that he 'went down into the water, and came up out of the water?' and is not that just the same as if it was said that he was *immersed*?" "Not exactly so, Mrs. B.; for you may remember it is stated that *both* Philip and the *Eunuch* went down into and came up out of the water,—and you do not, I presume, believe that Philip baptized himself as well as the *Ethiopian*?" "Why no, to be sure. Well, I declare, I never thought of that, now." And then, recovering a little from her surprise, she added, "But, perhaps, he did after all: why not? It *might* have been so, you know; and as it *says* that they *both* went down into the water, it *was* so, of course." "Well, Mrs. B.," I observed, "you are the most consistent Baptist I ever met with, and you are even wiser than your

husband; for though I have often heard him lay much stress upon the same words, to prove that *one* of the persons to whom they refer was immersed, he will not, as fairly as you have done, allow that this was also the case with the other."

"Thank you for your compliment, Mr. George," rejoined the worthy wife; "but I dare say my husband is right, for he never goes farther than the Bible." "I beg your pardon," I added, "but I am pretty sure that both he and other Baptists do so, whenever they use these words, which simply mean that they went down from the chariot to some water by the wayside, and then went up again, as a proof that either of them was immersed. You know that yesterday Mr. R. came down from the pulpit, and stood at the edge of the baptistery, while Mr. B. was baptizing; but was he immersed? Yet he went down to the water just as much as Philip and the Eunuch. Perhaps," I added, "you may remember, when I called at your house last week, that you opened the door yourself, and apologized to me for doing so, by saying that your servant had just gone down to the brook at the bottom of your garden to fetch some water. Now, I am sure that you did not intend me to understand from your words that Betsy had been baptized." "Oh! Mr. George," said the good lady,

“now you are joking.” “Not so, ma’am, I assure you ; I merely mention these cases because the language applicable to *them* conveys exactly the same idea, and no other, as the words upon which Mr. R. dwelt so long, which you have just quoted as a clear proof of immersion, and which form the most efficacious means of making Baptist converts.”

Just at this point of the conversation, the eldest daughter interposed the remark, that the words were not going down “to” and coming up “from,” but going down “into” and coming up “out of” the water. I allowed that there was some apparent force in her remark, but requested that, on her return home, she would ask Mr. R., who was still at her father’s house, to read from a Greek dictionary the various significations of the original terms, to the translations of which in this passage he had attached so much importance ; and also to point out some of the texts, of which there was a great number, where the same words had been rendered “to” and “from.” I assured her that, if she could persuade him to do this, she would never more think the argument which he had founded upon them worth a straw, and would be ashamed of those who supported their system by reasoning so false, and, to uninstructed per-

sons, so delusive. To this I added, that even were it otherwise, as the words do not describe the act of baptism, but merely what took place prior to its administration, they furnished no solution of the problem how the ordinance was performed, whether by plunging, pouring, or sprinkling.

Having been drawn thus far into discussion, I ventured to ask the ladies whether they could suppose that this African nobleman would have gone down, as he is represented to have done, direct from his chariot to be dipped, either in the travelling dress which he wore, or in other garments put on for the occasion? I inquired, further, whether in the place where this baptism was administered, and which was "desert," it would seem at all probable that a suitable spot for immersion should have been so easily found? And I appealed to the young ladies, whether they had not learned enough of Eastern deserts while at school to satisfy them that the thirsty traveller through such a region is about as likely to meet with a stream of gold, as a stream of water there, deep enough for such a purpose.

Whether the mother thought that I was making some impression upon her daughters or

not, who seemed amazed at these and other arguments, which had hitherto been carefully concealed from them, I do not know, but she soon rose to depart; and as she retired, she whispered into my ear, "Do, Mr. George, lay aside your carnal reasonings, and take up the cross." I thanked her, smiled, and said good morning.

In the course of that week, several circumstances came to my knowledge which convineed me that Mr. R.'s sermon had given the highest satisfaction to the Baptists; and I also heard that, by some of them, my steadfastness was charitably ascribed to pride, obstinaey, and other similar causes. All this I should have disregarded, had I not ascertained that Mr. B. had not only allowed these unkind surmises to be uttered in his hearing without rebuke, but that he had helped to give them currency. I learned, moreover, that the preacher, also, who remained two or three days in the town, had with very bad taste, to say nothing stronger, affirmed that, if after such clear and scriptural proofs of immersion as he had advanced, I still clung to my previous prejudices, he feared that I must oe sinning against light, and like the Pharisees,

wilfully rejecting the counsel of God against myself.

Affected, and somewhat stung, by these ungenerous and injurious insinuations, I became anxious in some way to shield my own reputation, and to set forth the reasons which had convinced me that immersion had no scriptural support. But how to effect these objects, I could not for a time discover ; and as I had recently abstained from intercourse with the Independents in our town, lest my change should be ascribed to their efforts, I was shut up to my own resources. At length, however, I resolved to address a letter to Mr. R., stating some of the considerations which compelled me to reject the reasonings which he and others deemed so irresistible, and containing a remonstrance against some of the unworthy methods by which, in his discourse, he attempted to bias and prejudice his hearers. I determined, moreover, to circulate two or three copies of this letter amongst the congregation, with the hope that it might both vindicate my character and serve the cause of truth. This was rather a bold step, and I felt it to be so ; but my motives had been so unkindly misconstrued, and honour and fairness had been so set at naught, that I was impelled to do

what, under other circumstances, I should have shrunk from.

Having devoted the spare hours of several days to the task, I produced the following epistle :—

“ *S——, June, 18—.*

“ **REV. AND DEAR SIR,**—From my childhood I have regarded your office with reverence, and I trust that nothing I am about to write will appear to indicate a different state of feeling.

“ I have reason to believe that you are not unacquainted with the fact, that my views have recently undergone a change on the subject of baptism; and, if I am not misinformed, when you consented to preach at this place a short time since, you did so at the urgent solicitation of Mr. B., and partly with the design of counteracting the consequences which he apprehended might arise from my altered sentiments. I am also aware that some strong things have been said to my prejudice since the delivery of your sermon, to account for what is deemed, by a few, my obstinate adherence to error, and, unless I am strangely misled, by yourself as well as by others. Now, as I believe that, in this matter, I can truly say, ‘ Hercin do I exercise myself, always to have a conscience void of offence,’ I cannot be easy under such imputa-

tions ; and, in self-defence, I address this letter to you, though its contents will also be submitted to the consideration of others.

“ As the principal purpose for which I take my pen is to show you that I have sufficient reason for rejecting the opinion you so confidently maintained, that there is no baptism but immersion, I need not trouble you with a narrative of the circumstances which have brought me to this conclusion. I shall therefore proceed at once to the consideration of your recently delivered discourse ; and if I am able to show that the arguments it contained were inconclusive, I think my conduct will be entitled to a more kind and candid construction than it has hitherto received.

“ It will be in your recollection that, at the outset of your reasoning, you advanced the bold assertion that the original term *baptizo* would bear but one signification—that its invariable import was to immerse. This, therefore, you assumed to be its meaning in your text ; and by so doing you readily reached the conclusion that immersion alone was baptism. Like some other points in your sermon, there was a speciousness in this representation, which was singularly adapted to captivate the ignorant and unreflecting ; but a weaker or more worthless fallacy I do not believe the

whole sect of the Baptists would have been able to construct. It is founded upon two things—a false assumption, and a false assertion. The false assumption is, that the apostle referred, in the words ‘one baptism,’ to a ritual observance, and not to a spiritual privilege,—to the baptism of water, not of the Spirit. This you very composedly took for granted, and evidently wished your hearers to regard as a point which no one denied, or would ever venture to dispute. Now, did I not suspect that you had yourself assumed, without examination, the same thing which you wished your hearers to assume, I should propose to you the inquiry—Was this fair and honourable? To me it appears very surprising that any one, who even casually looks at the connection in which these words occur, should understand them as you did. But it is still more extraordinary that *you* should so understand them, who maintain that the term ‘baptism’ means merely ‘immersion’ or a ‘dipping.’ Such a translation of the word in this place would alone, I should have imagined, have been quite sufficient to satisfy any one that the inspired writer *must* have had a *different* idea in his mind from the *mere mode* of administering a Christian ordinance. Even upon the theory which you reject, that the word baptism means an outward purification, there

would be a great incongruity in its introduction in the midst of a number of references to subjects purely spiritual. But your translation renders the incongruity still greater. To see this, you have only to substitute the words 'one dipping' for 'one baptism,' and then to read the entire passage. This simple process, with most, would, I am persuaded, be decisive; and if, with this new version of your text (and it is your own,) you can believe that the inspired writer intended such a reference as you suppose—if you can see any propriety in his connecting together 'one faith, one Lord, and one God and Father of all,' with 'one dipping,'—I can only express my amazement, and avow my fear that nothing I could write would change your opinion. All that I could then require from you would be the reasons (and they ought to be very strong) which induce you to affix a meaning to the word 'baptism' so out of harmony with the context.

"But I think I can anticipate your method of meeting this demand. You will adduce the other false assumption, or, more correctly, false assertion, which was frequently repeated during your discourse, that to immerse was the sole signification of the original term. To this opinion I have no doubt many of your hearers gave their assent:

and if they did not, it was certainly no fault of yours; for the statement was so made as to convey the strongest assurance to the uninformed that it had never been denied, and could not possibly be disputed. But, sir, was it *right* to foster so false an impression in an assembly, the great majority of whom had never heard a sermon, nor read a line, from which they could learn the true state of the controversy? Knowing, as you did, that many of the most enlightened and eminent divines have firmly denied the very thing which you so confidently asserted, how could you withhold that fact from your congregation, and thus produce an erroneous impression?

“But it is not necessary for me to adduce their authority to prove that the word *baptizo* has more than one signification. Limited as my knowledge of Greek may be, I understand it sufficiently to affirm that your assertion is erroneous. Of this, the commonist school lexicon will furnish conclusive evidence. But I will not attempt to discuss the classical meaning of the term, nor is it necessary, since your assertion was confined to its use in the New Testament. Yet how you can assign such a sense to it there, and particularly in some passages, I cannot conceive. Do you really believe that the Israelites, who, we are told, were *bap-*

tized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, were really *dipped*, when you know that the cloud went ‘*before*’ them, and that they passed through the sea ‘*on dry ground?*’ Can you think that the apostle, when he calls the various purifications of the Jews ‘*divers baptisms*,’ only referred to dippings, although sprinkling was the ordinary mode ordained and practised, and that of which he was speaking in immediate connection with these words! You are well aware that the terms ‘*washing*’ and ‘*tables*,’ in the common translation of Mark vii. 4, are, in the original, ‘*baptizing*’ and ‘*beds*.’ You know, moreover, that what in the preceding verse is called *the washing of their hands* is here designated a baptism. The following is the literal translation of the passage: ‘For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they *wash their hands* oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they *baptize*, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the *baptism* of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and *beds*,’ or couches. Now, can you, contrary to the express declaration of the Evangelist, that washing the *hands* (which was generally performed by water being poured upon them) was a baptism, hold to your assertion

that there can be no baptism but the dipping of the entire person? And will you adopt, for the sake of this worthless theory, the absurd fiction that they *dipped* their bodies and their beds? Again, when on the day of Pentecost the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled, 'I will *pour out* my Spirit upon all flesh,' by the bestowment of that divine influence which Peter describes as being '*shed forth*' upon them, do you imagine, will you venture to declare, that they were then *dipped* with the Holy Ghost? Yet, if you are consistent, and if the word *baptizo* has no other meaning than that which you give to it, you *must* do this; for the very *descent* of divine influence described as a '*pouring out*,' and a '*shedding forth*,' was the spiritual baptism which Jesus had promised just before his ascension, when he said, '*Ye shall be baptized* with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.' But seriously, *can* you impute to John and to Jesus Christ, what in ordinary cases you would call the folly of selecting a word which signifies '*to dip and nothing but to dip*,' in order to describe a '*pouring out*' and a '*shedding forth*?' Had you not a false theory to support, I am sure your common sense would reject as utterly absurd such a meaning of the term employed by the Saviour. Similar remarks apply

to the case of Cornelius. When Peter saw the spirit '*fall*' upon the centurion and his company, '*then*,' he states, 'remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed *baptized* with water; but ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost.' Was a promise '*to dip*' with the Holy Ghost performed when his influence merely '*fell*' upon them? Such is the gross absurdity which your way of understanding the word *baptizo* would compel you to believe.

"But I need not multiply these examples. I will therefore proceed to the next topic in your discourse. After repeatedly affirming (for argument there was none) that *baptizo* always meant to immerse, you attempted to support your assertion by adducing 'other terms used in the New Testament to describe the ordinance.' These, I am confident, were your very words, for they attracted my attention so strongly as to imprint themselves indelibly upon my memory. For a moment after this announcement, I expected some startling novelty, and greatly wondered what this could be. But imagine my surprise, on discovering that the expressions which were to do so much towards deciding the dispute were no others than the hackneyed '*into*' and '*out of the water*,' the inconclusiveness of which in proof of immer-

sion has been so often demonstrated. When, therefore, I heard you name the 8th chapter of the Acts, I could not repress a smile at my own simplicity in expecting an original argument on the Baptist side of the controversy; but as you read the expressions '*into* the water,' and '*out of* the water,' repeating the words '*into*' and '*out of*,' and laying a very heavy emphasis upon '*in*' and '*out*,' my smile gave place to shame and sorrow; and I found it impossible to restrain the risings of what I thought then, and think still, was a righteous indignation, that a man of sense, and a minister of truth, should so pervert the meaning of Scripture terms, and impose upon the credulity of the people. I reasoned thus within myself,—'Mr. R. either knows the original of this passage, or he does not. If he does not, how unworthy and unwarrantable are all his pretensions to knowledge! but if he does, how can he venture to handle the word of the Lord thus deceitfully, and by so doing, not only confirm, but studiously convey a false impression?' I am aware that you did not assert in so many words that the '*into*' and '*out of*' did by themselves describe immersion. Had you so done, there would indeed have been less caution, but more candour; less contrivance, but greater integrity.

But although you did not so far commit yourself, the *effect* upon your hearers, both of what you said, and of what you omitted, was precisely the *same* as if you had told them in plain terms—‘The meaning of into and out of is immerse.’ This was my conviction when I heard you; and since then it has been confirmed by two circumstances which have come under my notice.

“One of these occurred in a recent conversation with Mrs. B., whom you thoroughly convinced, to use her own language, that the words ‘meant all the same as baptize.’ I met with the other, last Sabbath, when, as superintendent of our Sunday School, I happened, while writing at my desk, to overhear a female teacher of the Testament class (one of the very persons, by the way, who were baptized after your sermon,) explaining the history of Philip and the eunuch to her pupils. As my curiosity was excited by the circumstance, and I rather wished to hear how she understood the words of which you made so sad a use, I remained in the same spot until the children read the passage in which the prepositions occur, when the teacher stopped them, and thus addressed one of her pupils. ‘Well, Jane, who is here said to have been baptized? *Child.*—‘The eunuch.’ ‘And what is baptism, Eliza?’ ‘To be put under the

water, teacher?' 'Very true, my dear; and now can you tell me where it is said that this was the way in which Philip baptized the eunuch?' For a time there was a pause; and on a repetition of the question, I saw several of the girls carefully conning over the history to find (as I supposed) the word 'dip,' or some similar expression. But the search was ineffectual. Not a child could make the desired discovery, or hit upon the answer which their teacher required. Upon this, she proceeded, as nearly as I can recollect, but I will not be confident that I retain every expression, in the following strain: 'I am quite surprised, my dears, that you cannot answer my question. Nothing can be plainer. Why, is it not said that they went down *into* the water, and came up *out of* the water? and don't you know that this means that the eunuch was immersed? Don't you remember that Mr. R., when he explained this passage to us, said that nothing could be clearer?' By this appeal the poor children were silenced; but I hope they were wiser than their teacher, and far from being satisfied.

"I should not have mentioned these cases, had I not been persuaded that they furnish a fair sample of the kind of reasoning upon which very many Baptists found their belief in the authority of im-

mersion. Though young, I have not been unob-servant; and my opportunities of ascertaining the class of arguments which are most approved by your denomination, and to which its ministers give the greatest currency, have been considerable. I think, therefore, that without presumption, I may venture to affirm that nine-tenths of the members of the church in this town are as firmly convinced that to go down into, and come up out of the water, means to be immersed, as they are that you intended to convey to them that impression. Do you deny this? Then will you revisit this place, and, without any previous intimation of your de-sign, will you accompany me to the houses of any twenty members of the church, and ask their opinion on the point? I will readily abide by the result.

“But *you*, I am satisfied, require no proof of my assertion. You know too much of your own denomination. How then can you sanction, still more employ, a mode of representation which you must be aware only serves to foster a very gross misconception? I shall pass over your emphatic ‘*into*’ and ‘*out of*’ with the single remark, that this method of proving im-mersion resembled that by which a certain preacher proved that the punishment of the

wicked must be eternal, because the Scripture assures us that it will be not only 'for ever,' but for 'evermore.'

"Leaving you, however, to reconcile your ingenious, but certainly not ingenuous device, with fairness and truth, permit me to press the inquiry—How could you honestly found your argument as you did upon these words? Whatever others may imagine, *you*, I am satisfied, do not hold that going down *into* the water, and going down *under* the water, are one and the same thing. You *must* know that the *very utmost*, which even the least scrupulous and most determined Baptist can make these words mean, is that the Evangelist and the Ethiopian stood in the water. But do they require even this signification, or can you fairly force it upon them? I confidently answer, No. And ere the terms can be made to serve your purpose thus far, you must be prepared to show that it is their constant, or *at least* their common import. But I am sure you are too cautious to affirm any such thing, and are well aware of the fact, that in a great number of texts they are translated 'at,' 'to,' or 'unto,' and 'from;' and moreover, that they would not admit of any different rendering. Of this use I will present you with two instances; and I might

give two hundred. ‘I am not sent but *unto* (not into) the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ ‘And his fellow-servant fell down *at* (not into) his feet.’ These are specimens of the use of the word which you read *into*; and how far they sanction or condemn such a disingenuous use of it, I might confidently leave to every impartial judge. Of the sense in which the original word rendered ‘out of,’ in the 8th of Acts, often occurs, the following are examples. ‘The baptism of John, whence was it? *From* heaven, or *of* men?’ ‘He riseth *from* supper.’

“Now, sir, do you suppose that your recent hearers in this place could have gathered, or imagined, from your mode of dealing with these expressions, that they were *capable* of any construction but one? I do not ask, whether you *intended* to produce the impression that you were conveying the only signification they would bear, but sure I am that this was the effect both of what you said and of what you omitted. No one, unless they were better informed on the point from other quarters, would have conceived, from the use you made of the translation, that they ever meant ‘in,’ ‘to,’ ‘unto,’ ‘at,’ or ‘from.’ And yours, I fear, has not been a solitary case of successful delusion in the same line. I know,

indeed, that some ministers of your denomination are too honourable and too upright thus to impose upon the confidence and credulity of their flocks. They would scorn, for the sake of a pulpit triumph, or a party purpose, to withhold from the people what was due both to themselves and to the truth of God. Instead of declaiming, as you did, upon the *into* and *out of*, they would confess, as indeed some of them have done, that these terms decide nothing.

“And why do any act otherwise? Why do they restrict the meaning of these indefinite words, and give them in penny tracts and pulpit oratory such singular prominence? You may deem my explanation of this circumstance rather uncharitable; but I cannot resist, and I will not conceal the conviction that it is done for two reasons. In the first place, I believe these words receive so much honour because no better proof of immersion can be found in the Bible: tolerably conclusive evidence, by the way, that the whole theory is a castle in the clouds. And, in the second place, I cannot divest myself of the conviction, that this is also done because the argument thus obtained is specious, and more calculated to captivate the ignorant, and to make converts to your creed, than all the elaborate disquisitions of your most learned

apologists. Is not this the truth? Do you not know, that were you to inform the mass of your people that the original words had various meanings, and decided nothing in favour of immersion, their prejudices would be shocked and shaken to the very foundation, and that by this single blow the strong pillars of their confidence in the divine right of dipping would be destroyed? Only try the experiment. Preach a thoroughly impartial sermon on this passage. Bring forward the parallel texts; and by these illustrate the various significations of the original terms here translated 'into' and 'out of,' and mark the *result* upon the members of your church. What would many of them think and say? Would they not suspect your orthodoxy, or conclude that you had turned Independent? As your candid and truthful expositions drew from their fond embrace the monosyllables in which they had long trusted, would they not cry out with sorrow and alarm, 'You have taken away our strong confidence,—and what have we more?'

"Your next argument in favour of immersion was founded upon what you designated '*the places* in which the ordinance was administered.' When I heard you announce your intention of taking this ground, I was greatly gratified, because I had pre-

viously arrived at the conviction that there was no method in which the point in debate might be more fairly viewed, or more readily determined. Having, moreover, paid particular attention to this very point, and having thus had my conviction confirmed, that immersion could not have been the ordinary mode of baptizing in the primitive age, I was rather curious to know how you would deal with some of the circumstances in which the ordinance was administered by the apostles. These, instead of sanctioning your practice, had appeared to me to furnish the clearest proofs against it; and my impression was that no sophistry, nor special pleading whatever, could make it appear otherwise. And may I add that, notwithstanding your announcement, as you proceeded I could not avoid the suspicion that even you held the same opinion? So limited was your selection of some places, and so silently did you pass over others, that I was constrained to admire your discretion, whatever I might think of your impartiality.

“Several localities are specified in the New Testament where the ordinance was administered. John and the apostles, we learn, baptized in *Ænon*, Jordan, and Jerusalem, in the city of Samaria, in Damascus, in Corinth, in Philippi, in

Cæsarea, in Ephesus, in a desert, in a private house, and in a prison. When, therefore, you announced your intention of proving immersion from 'the places' in which baptism was performed, your hearers had a right to expect *some* reference at least to the major part of those mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. But nothing could seem to have been further from your thoughts. No, sir; not one of these numerous spots did you so much as name. As if aware that even an allusion to them would damage your cause, or defeat your design, you shunned, with the utmost caution, Solomon's porch and the other preaching stations at Jerusalem; neither did you think it necessary to go through Samaria, and visit a city supplied from a solitary well, and where, consequently, there could be neither 'much water' nor many Baptists to gladden your eyes or help your argument. With equal circumspection, you kept at a safe distance from Damascus and Cæsarea; and would on no account cross the boundary of Asia Minor, or look towards Ephesus, Corinth, and Philippi. All these were 'dry places,' abandoned to the evil spirits of the sprinklers, and very dreadful to those who practise dipping.

"It is true you brought us 'into' the 'desert,'

where Philip baptized the eunuch, and kept us there so long that we were heartily glad to get 'out of' it again. But, strange to say, you never, during all this time, once told us to what place we had been allured by your syren tongue, and few of your hearers imagined that they were surrounded by arid wastes and scorching sands. And why was this? Did you apprehend that the mere name 'desert' would have originated reasonings, or suggested suspicions unfriendly to your design? Were you fearful that it might diminish the force or destroy the illusion of the decisive 'into' and 'out of,' or that it would instantly dry up the broad river with which your heated and airy fancy, as with the deceitful mirage which mocks the weary traveller, had watered that dry and thirsty land? If so, I commend your caution. It was admirably prudent. Had you done otherwise—had you faithfully described the features of an Eastern desert, and, particularly, had you told us the well-known fact that, instead of being a place of broad streams and admirable baptisteries, the only water there is found in a few scanty, shrunken, diminutive rills and fountains, your reasoning from 'the places' in which baptism was performed would have been sadly damaged. And if you had then added, what I

presume you must have known, that all the travellers since the days of Jerome have failed to discover, in the region through which the Ethiopian journeyed, any stream deep enough for an immersion, the consequences would have been, first, the amazement of your confiding hearers, and, secondly, the annihilation of your poor argument.

“ After having seen you studiously shun many noble cities, I was not surprised at your keeping far aloof from the house of Cornelius, and shrinking with dread from the prison at Philippi. The latter, especially in the dead of night, was one of the most unpleasant and inconvenient places into which a worthy Baptist minister could have been thrust; and I question whether he would not find it quite as easy in such a situation to burst the prison bolts and bars as to immerse an adult. To create a bath or construct a baptistery in an Eastern dungeon, to change apparel, and make other preparations, to stand up to the middle in water until the gaoler and family were dipped, and, moreover, to do all this in ‘the same hour of the night’ on which he was converted, certainly demanded such conveniences and resources as fully to justify the dislike with which you turned from such a spot and such a service. I know that some

of your brethren are ‘very bold ;’ and however their physical powers may be restrained, they act upon the principle that their spirits are free. And ‘free’ indeed they sometimes are,—so free that, finding no good baptistery within the prison walls, they have ventured, without authority, to open its doors, and to lead Paul with the gaoler and his household through the city to some river in the neighbourhood ; and having seen the converts well dipped in the dark, they have led them back again, and safely restored them to their cells, if not to the stocks ! I do not charge this folly upon you, because you acted the wiser part of saying nothing on the subject.

“ And now, sir, permit me seriously to ask, why you omitted all these references to ‘*the places*’ in which baptism was administered. Was it because the circumstances of Eastern cities, dwellings, deserts, and dungeons could throw no light at all upon the practice of the apostles ? Or was it because the light thus obtained would have made revelations of which your hearers had never dreamed, and have disclosed difficulties and engendered doubts which would have seriously obstructed your design ?

“ You cannot but know that many wise and upright men reject your theory of baptism, amongst

other reasons, because they cannot reconcile it with '*the places*' and circumstances in which the rite was originally practised. Now, their objections were entitled to your attention, and, before you spoke so positively on the point, you ought to have noticed them. And I, for one, should have been much interested to have heard by what process, for example, the three thousand could have been dipped at Jerusalem on the very day of their conviction. As all the apostles must have been occupied in this labour at the same time, they must have required either a dozen separate baptisteries, or one at least twelve times as large as that in which you officiate. Now, it would have been a piece of information, as curious as it would be valuable, had you even surmised in what part of the city, or from what source, especially during the passover, when water was so precious, the despised Galileans could have obtained this large supply. It would also have been interesting had you suggested how the multitude were so speedily prepared for the service, and the whole affair despatched with so much ease and expedition, as the inspired narrative would lead us to suppose. You do not believe, I presume, that these foreign Jews, who had been drawn by mere rumour to the place where Peter was preaching, and without the least

conception of the result, came there, like those whom Mr. B. recently immersed, suitably dressed for the occasion, or that each of them brought a baptizing suit under his arm. How then was the ablution performed? Were they all plunged in their ordinary apparel? and after their drenching, did they in this picturesque condition walk back to their places of abode, to the great edification of the boys and girls of Jerusalem? Or do you suppose that, as soon as they heard the command, 'Be baptized, every one of you,' they dispersed, and were seen running in every direction through the streets of the city to their respective dwellings, to procure changes of raiment for the purpose? And what do you think of the case of the apostles? Had they on the morning of that day foreseen the duty they would be called to discharge? and had they made this necessary provision? Something of this kind must have been done both by the baptized and the baptizers, if the former were initiated by dipping.

"I could have wished, also, that you had said something about the time which *must* have been consumed in this process. When you saw Mr. B. baptize seven adults in our chapel, he took about half an hour in that service. Now, had he continued at the same work, without relaxation, for

six hours (the very utmost period which the apostles *could* have occupied in baptizing the 3000,) he would have administered the rite to about ninety persons. *Possibly*, with great diligence and despatch, the number might have been doubled, though it would have been wet and weary work. Now multiply 180 by 12, (the number of the apostles,) and you will have a total of 2160. A greater number than this it must have been physically impossible for them to have immersed; but even then, nearly a third of the converts would have remained unbaptized. And all this supposes that no preparation whatever was requisite for the immersion of this multitude; that every thing was perfectly ready, and immediately at hand; and that there was a river or reservoir just at the preaching station, with suitable dresses, separate apartments, and every other requisite for the service. How pleased would many of your hearers have been—none more than myself—had you explained how all this was accomplished! Considering the circumstances, the immersion of so many in so short a time must have been almost as miraculous as the gift of tongues, or any other of the wonders of that memorable day. But you wisely abstained from such presumptuous speculations, and discreetly avoided the road to Jerusalem. Ah, sir! silence

is ofttimes more significant than speech, and such circumspect omissions suggest strange surmisings.

“ But although the majority of ‘ *the places* ’ in which baptism was performed during the first age of Christianity was disregarded, you did not, I allow, altogether omit a reference to those localities. Out of the nine named in the New Testament, two have secured the signal favour and special patronage of your denomination, and these in your recent sermon (most unfairly, I think) monopolized your attention. As I listened to you, I was forcibly struck with a parallel between your case and that of Lot, when he parted company with his generous relative. Although the whole land of sacred history lay spread out before you, Judea, Samaria, Syria, Asia Minor, and Macedonia, and you had the opportunity of traversing its entire extent, you looked over its varied scenery, but could discover no ground on which to construct a theory or raise an argument in favour of immersion. No sooner, however, did your wandering and weary eye rest upon the ‘ well-watered ’ plains of Jordan, and upon *Ænon*, with its many springs, than, exulting in the imaginary advantages of such localities for frequent immersions, you gladly separated yourself from those who, like Abraham, fear not to take any direction,—you hastily

turned from the dry regions which the apostles traversed, and from the arid spots where they baptized; and, at the risk of higher interests than those of a denomination, here you resolved to pitch your tent, and found your theory.

“ You may possibly smile at my comparison, but I will now turn to topics which should make you serious. Permit me, then, to inquire why you selected Jordan and *Ænon* only, and maintained throughout your discourse the silence of the grave in regard to the features of those more numerous places which I have named? And allow me also to ask, whether it never struck you as strange that you and your brethren, who so loudly profess to tread in the steps of inspired men more closely than others, and to conform more exactly to their proceedings, should be forced to go for their strongest arguments to the practice of *John*, while they shun the path of the apostles.

“ But there is another consideration connected with the baptisms of the great forerunner of our Lord which deserves your particular attention. You are well aware that the two references upon which you rely stand alone. It was *John* only who selected Jordan and *Ænon*, because these spots were abundantly supplied with water. Nothing of this kind is stated in reference to any of

the apostles. Not a syllable occurs in the Acts which would sanction the supposition that *they* fixed upon streams for preaching-stations; and not even the most shadowy allusion can be discerned which would support the belief that *they* needed much water for *their* baptisms. On the contrary, it is perfectly evident that at all times, and in all places, they found enough for this purpose. Instead of going to the Jordan, or to *Ænon*, they obtained, as we have seen, an ample supply on the very spots where they delivered their message, whether this was done in a city, a dwelling, a dungeon, or a desert. Now how do *you* account for a difference so very marked, and so very remarkable? If John chose these two stations solely because they supplied water enough for dipping his disciples, is it not singular that none of the apostles should have ever made any similar selection? *They* also baptized great numbers; and if they did this by immersion, it is not easy to explain the great difference between his proceeding in this respect and theirs. Upon your scheme, it is very unaccountable, if much water was necessary merely for baptism, that John should have been stationary, and the apostles itinerating; that *he* should have been obliged, for the sake of sufficient baptismal water, to remain long at

Jordan and *Æ*non, while they went everywhere, and, wherever they went, found an ample supply.

“But there *is* a key to this mystery, though it is not that which you carried into our pulpit. It is found in the peculiar circumstances of John; and will be easily discovered, if the simple question be but fairly answered,—For what purpose did he require water *in the greatest quantity*, in order that he might fulfil his mission, and continue his ministrations amongst the multitudes that came to his baptism? I need not remind you (for you have quoted the words often enough) that he baptized in *Æ*non ‘*because* there was much water there.’ Hence it appears that the ample supply of this necessary of life was the chief motive for this selection. If, then, we can ascertain *why* water was *most* needed, we shall instantly discover the reason of his choice. Was it then for the performance of baptism, or for any other purpose? Now I readily allow that ‘much water’ must have been required, not merely for the immersion, but even for the affusion of the myriads who came to John’s baptism; but, however great the quantity which might have been necessary for such a service, the question is this, —Was not much, *very* much, more essential for any other use? This is the pivot upon which the

explanation of the passage turns. If it can be shown that a quantity immeasurably greater than would be requisite for the immersion of his followers was in daily demand for a different purpose, it cannot be supposed that the evangelist would have assigned the weaker reason for John's selection of *Ænon*, and have disregarded the stronger.

"If you will admit the reasonableness of this rule of judging, the dispute may be speedily decided. In the first place, you have only to compute the numbers that went to John's ministry; in the second place, to consider the prodigious quantity of water which such a multitude must have required for themselves and their cattle; and, finally, to compare that quantity with what would have been sufficient for their immersion,—and the reason of John's choice will be instantly apparent. After such a comparison, could any candid person hesitate for a moment to allow that immeasurably more water was essential for the *ordinary use* of these myriads than for their *baptism*, however administered? And if so, is not the inference much more probable that John fixed upon the vicinity of Jordan and *Ænon* 'because there was much water there,' that his numerous auditors might not be compelled to leave

his ministry by the scarcity of this necessary of life, than your very unsatisfactory theory? Let the two explanations be placed before any impartial person, and I will readily abide by their decision. But nothing like this was attempted in your sermon. On the contrary, you never uttered a syllable which could have led us to suppose that there was any purpose whatever for which the waters of *Æuon* might have been required, except that of immersing the people; nor even that a different motive for John's selection ever had been, or ever could be assigned.

“But I must here break for a moment the thread of my observations upon this point, for the purpose of making a single remark. When you founded your argument upon the places which John chose, you reasoned in such a manner as to produce the impression that, unless he had been within reach of a large stream, he could not have baptized the people; but some of your writers, who also insist upon the same point, see no difficulty whatever in the supposition that the apostles dipped 3000 in Jerusalem during a single afternoon, and multitudes in other places, as soon as they were converted. All this, in their view, was very possible; indeed, it was perfectly easy,—nothing more so! *How* it was so easy they do

not inform us ; but they are infallibly sure of the fact. It was absolutely necessary, forsooth, that John should have kept hard by Jordan or *Ænon*, to obtain sufficient water for *his* immersions ; but the more favoured apostles could find enough for theirs anywhere. I marvel much that the opposite representations of your advocates, and their contradictory reasonings, do not convince you that your immersion scheme has in it nothing of the coherence and consistency of truth, and that what you build up with one hand you are compelled to pull down with the other.

“ But I must return to *Ænon*. And I do this in order to ask in what way you conceive it to have been possible for John to have fulfilled his course, had he ministered in any place which did not yield much water ? Had he chosen a spot where the supply was scanty, would ‘ Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,’ have gone to his baptism ? Great as was his fame, would *that* have been sufficiently attractive to overcome the dread of a dry and thirsty land, or to have induced a multitude to expose themselves in that hot climate, even for a single day, to the terrible effects of the want of water ? Need I remind you of the motive which prompts the wandering Arab to pitch his tent, and the tra-

velling caravan to form an encampment? Do you not know that they are always influenced by the very reason which, I believe, led John to the Jordan? Is it necessary for me to adduce evidence of the fact, that in the East a well or water-spring has, far beyond any other cause, attracted multitudes to its locality, and caused villages and cities to spring up around it? When, therefore, you recollect that the attendants upon John's ministry could rarely have been fewer than the inhabitants of a large town, and that he continued his labours through a part of the year when many of the springs of Judea had failed, must it not be evident that, had he not selected a station where water was both abundant and unfailing, the multitudes that came to his baptism could not even have been sprinkled, much less supplied and satisfied? He, therefore, wisely fixed upon *AEnon*; and he did this, I am persuaded, for precisely the same reason which induced Moses to select another and very similar place of sojourn in the wilderness. 'And they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and they encamped there by the waters.'

"The natural explanation of John's choice is both illustrated and confirmed by other considerations. In the first place, the literal translation of

the original words (as you well know), rendered 'much water,' would be '*many* waters;' and the terms evidently designate several small streams or wells, like those at Elim, and *not* a body of water fit for a baptistery, such as you would delight in, and as your representations, without proof or probability, led your unreflecting hearers to believe existed in that place. And, secondly, with this opinion, but with no other, the facts agree, that Josephus, who describes all the principal fountains of Judea, never so much as names *Ænon*; and, further, that a solitary well is all that now remains to mark the position of this far-famed source of much water and more controversy.

"But while I do not believe that the springs of *Ænon* were suitable for plunging a multitude, Jordan, I grant, was deep enough to dip and drown the whole population of the land. In that ample stream, indeed, immersion was quite possible. But is it probable that the neighbourhood of this river was chosen for such a purpose merely, when a different supposition accounts so much better for its selection? I was just going to say, you surely would not find an argument upon the expression 'in' Jordan: but I had forgotten, for a moment, that you *did* this in your sermon; and that, by so doing, you demonstrated still more

than before the miserable weakness of a cause which required such support,—whilst, moreover, if you did not impose upon yourself, you sadly misled that portion of your hearers who could be caught by the mere sound of words and show of argument. Surely, you must know that 'in,' when used as it is here, before the name of a place, commonly signifies 'at.' You would, I am convinced, admit that this is its meaning, when we read '*in Aenon*,' and '*in Bethabara*.' And no one would hesitate for a moment to admit that the words '*at Aenon*,' and '*at Bethabara*,' would exactly convey the import of the expression. Why, then, should a different construction be forced upon the same term when 'Jordan' follows it? I am sure that you can give me none, except it be this: that 'in' supplies a more plausible argument for immersion than 'at.'

— "You and some of your brethren must possess an extraordinary measure of that faith which removes mountains, or I am sure the gigantic difficulties which oppress your theory of John's baptism would, long ere now, have crushed it to the dust. But so far from this, they have not made you either stumble or stagger in your adventurous course of bold assertion. If, for instance, the forerunner of Jesus was *such* a Baptist as you

imagine, he must have spent his days up to the waist in water, plunging, with breathless haste and undiminished vigour, the multitudes who flocked to his baptism. Such bodily exercise may, in your esteem, differ essentially from that 'which profiteth little ;' and possibly this mode of living, which to me seems more allied to that of the fish than of the man, may appear dignified and delightful. 'There is no accounting for tastes ;' but I have grave doubts whether, even if you survived the experiment, a month's labour, such as you impute to John, would not marvellously modify your views and feelings, and prepare you to adopt those milder measures which you now abhor. Be that as it may, it appears to me, and to many more, that the wet and weary work which you assign to the honoured herald of the Messiah, and in which, if he immersed all his converts, his time and energies must have been wholly absorbed, accord but very little with the sublime purpose he was sent of God to fulfil, or with the certain fact that a large proportion of his time was occupied in preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

"To these remarks I have only to add a brief reference to the long period which John's baptisms (if they were immersions) must have consumed. It was this view of the subject which first shook

my faith in *your* doctrine of baptisms; and the more I have considered it, the stronger has the conviction grown that it was physically impossible for him to have dipped his proselytes. If he did, he plunged as many every day as the most expert and vigorous immersionist in Christendom could now do in a week, and thus performed the work of seven weary years in less than one! If you can either believe this, or, upon your principle, draw from the Scripture history any different conclusion, I shall greatly marvel.

“But I must now consider your closing argument, and that which you intended to be so in more senses than one. It was deduced, you will remember, from the words of Paul, ‘*buried with him in baptism.*’ In this metaphor you thought you could discover a very distinct allusion to dipping. Now I had frequently heard this passage quoted by Baptists before I heard it from you; but I know not how it was that you contrived, either by your delivery or your mode of illustration, to suggest to my imagination more vivid conceptions on the subject than I had ever before entertained. I was constrained, for instance, while Mr. B. was administering the ordinance, to look at the whole proceeding as a burial service, the baptistery as a species of sepulchre, and our worthy

pastor as the sexton in this very singular kind of interment. All that seemed wanting to render the resemblance perfect was, that the officiating person, instead of descending *with* the party about to be ‘buried in baptism,’ should merely stand on one side of ‘the watery grave;’ while a deacon, or some other spiritual sub-sexton, stood opposite to him, and, with ropes duly adjusted, should have slowly let down the body into the baptistery.

“It is possible that, in your expositions of this passage, you have not been accustomed to carry out the idea quite so far as I did; but yet I think you do this rather further than reason or Scripture warrants. For what is the effect which your use of the term ‘buried in baptism’ must have produced upon uninstructed persons? Unacquainted, as they are, with the ancient method of entombment, they would think merely of a common grave, and fancy some resemblance between the lowering of a corpse and the plunging of a convert. This, I admit, like some of your other representations, is well calculated to catch and captivate the ignorant. But you know that the idea thus suggested is *not* the sentiment of the passage,—that Paul never saw, nor heard of, nor imagined a burial like that which is most common amongst ourselves; and, therefore, that he could not have intended any al-

lusion to it. This, whatever other use you may make of the words, you ought to have explained, and not to have fostered the delusion which, upon this point, is so prevalent amongst the Baptists. I do not believe that the apostle alluded to *any* mode of burial; but if he did, it is self-evident that it must have been, not to a mode like ours, which was then unknown, but to that which was practised in Judea. What that was, you know. Instead of *lowering* the body into a grave, it was *carried* into a cave or chamber, such as the sepulchres of our Lord and Lazarus, and there placed on a shelf, or in a niche, 'as the manner of the Jews was to bury.' Did your late hearers dream of this, when you declaimed to them about being 'buried in baptism?' Had they known the simple fact which I have just stated, and been compelled to seek for a correspondence between a burial in Judea and a baptism in Salem Chapel, how perplexed, how confounded would they have been! That most elaborate part of your sermon, sir, would have only confused, instead of convincing them. An acquaintance with Jewish rites and Oriental customs is, generally, in high repute, on account of the light which this knowledge throws upon many Scripture allusions. Would that this branch of biblical literature was more cultivated by your

denomination! It would, I am convinced, greatly promote the right understanding of God's word; *but*—it would annihilate your most popular arguments for immersion.

“But, however important the knowledge of ancient usages might generally be, it is by no means necessary to destroy the illusion created by your misapplication of the words ‘buried in baptism,’ if you would only translate them in exact accordance with your theory and practice. If, instead of saying ‘buried in *baptism*,’ you were to say ‘buried in *dipping*,’ I feel convinced that all your rhetoric would fail to produce the belief that a representation so strange and senseless could have proceeded from an inspired pen.

“Hitherto my reasoning upon these misused expressions has been founded upon the assumption that they contain some reference, at least, to baptism by water, if not (as you imagine) to the mode of its administration. This, in your sermon, you quietly took for granted, as many of your brethren had done before you. But, in reality, is there any such reference either in the 6th of Romans, or in a parallel passage in the 2d of Colossians? Is it quite so evident as you appeared to think that Paul spake merely of an outward rite, or ceremonial observance? *Might* he

not have intended to describe an *inward* operation, a *spiritual* cleansing? The word ‘baptism’ alone decides nothing on this point. It *may*, indeed, designate the application of water, but it *may* refer to the influence of the Holy Spirit. This, surely, you will not dispute. The ‘promise of the Father,’ which Jesus left with his disciples when he ascended to his throne, was this,—‘Ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost;’ and in these words he described, as John had done before him, the grand peculiarity of the Christian dispensation. *Why* the word ‘baptism’ was thus specially selected to describe divine influence, I need not stay to inquire; but that it *was* so selected is certain, and, doubtless, amongst other reasons, because no term beside was equally expressive. Sanctioned, then, and sanctified as this word was, by John and Jesus, to designate that spiritual influence which renews the heart, is it probable that the apostles should never have called the same blessing by the same name? Nothing would seem more unlikely than this. On the other hand, nothing could be more reasonable than to expect that they should, in this matter, conform to the teaching of their Master, and use the term ‘baptism’ as he had used it, to describe *the Spirit* which he had given them

Whether they have done so can only be ascertained by carefully considering the connection in which the word is found.

“I shall, therefore, proceed to the paragraphs where the words ‘buried in baptism’ and ‘by baptism’ occur. And I am persuaded, that if you will but lay aside the sectarian spectacles through which you have been accustomed to look at these isolated expressions, ascertain the leading sentiment and scope of the passages of which they form a part, and compare them with other metaphorical terms of the same kind with which they are connected, your confidence in the argument which you founded upon them in favour of ‘immersion’ will be somewhat shaken.

“I cannot here give a very minute and extended exposition of the passages which contain the doubtful term. There are, however, two or three considerations which would, I think, carry the conviction to any unbiassed mind that in both the apostle refers solely to a spiritual state.

“1st. It will not, I believe, be questioned that *every* other term employed in connection with the words ‘baptize’ and ‘baptism’ in these Scriptures describes spiritual blessings. A different signification can scarcely be given to the

following expressions, which form parts of the passage in the Epistle to the Romans: 'dead to sin,' 'planted together in the likeness of his death,' 'our old man crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed,' 'freed from sin,' 'dead with Christ,' 'dead, indeed, unto sin.' Now, in the very midst of these descriptions of the great spiritual change through which all believers have passed, we meet with the words, 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.' Why, then, should these words be supposed to refer to a mere sign, whilst all the others describe the thing signified? It is not very probable that Paul intended to treat of two subjects in one single paragraph. Neither was it usual with him to compound things that differ so completely, as he has done in this place, if some of his references are to the baptism of water, and others to the renewing of the Holy Ghost. And why should such an unnatural supposition be entertained? It surely is not favourable to the clear comprehension of the passage, however useful it may be deemed to countenance immersion.

"Similar remarks apply to the parallel state-

ments in the Epistle to the Colossians. Here, in the closest possible connection with the words 'buried with him in baptism,' Christians are described as 'complete' in Christ, 'circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ,' 'risen with him through the faith of the operation of God,' and 'quickened together with him.' Now, why assign a totally different sense to figures so very similar as those which are here brought together, apparently at least to illustrate one subject, and that subject purely spiritual? I cannot discover the least reason why this should have been done. Without referring to the other expressions, though they strengthen the argument, it may suffice to select two of the words which are here introduced together, 'circumcision' and 'baptism.' The former of these you would, I suppose, acknowledge to be entirely figurative. This indeed is unquestionable, because many of the Christians at Colosse, being Gentiles, were, in a literal sense, uncircumcised. But if it is certain that the term 'circumcision' was used to designate a purely spiritual state, 'the circumcision of the heart,' is it probable that Paul intended the similar term 'baptism' to denote a merely external ordinance? If the

one describes what is spiritual, why should not the other? Strong reason ought to be assigned for so strange a difference.

“2d. But this conclusion obtains additional support from other expressions which stand in connection with the disputed terms. It is said, for example, that we are ‘baptized *into* Jesus Christ,’ and ‘*into* his death;’ that we are ‘buried *with him*, by baptism, *into death*,’ clearly the death which the apostle describes in the same sentence as being ‘dead to sin.’ Could this have been affirmed of water baptism? Is the external rite in any sense a baptism ‘*into Christ*,’ or ‘*into death*?’ Do we *thus* ‘die indeed unto sin,’ or is this great change wrought by the better baptism of the Holy Spirit? Moreover, those who are said to be ‘baptized into death’ are also described as ‘*raised up* from the dead,’ *by the same baptism*. This is most evident from the following statement in the Epistle to the Colossians. ‘Buried with him in (or by) baptism, *wherein* (or whereby) *also* ye are *risen* with him.’ Hence it is most evident, whatever the operation may be, whether of water or of the Spirit, that it is one by which we pass from death unto life. But how is this wrought? By what agency are we raised into newness of life? The apostle shall answer

these questions, and decide the doubtful case. In one of the two passages he tells us that this is done 'by the glory of the Father;' and in the other, 'through the faith of the operation of God.' I can scarcely suppose that you would assign two causes, a ritual and a spiritual, for the production of one joint effect, or maintain that the death and burial of a believer are effected by an outward ordinance, while his resurrection is wrought by the glory of the Father and by faith. And yet I know not how you can do otherwise, if you hold to that interpretation of the text which you advanced in your discourse.

"These, however, are not the only parts of the context which throw light upon the words 'baptized into his death,' and 'buried with him in baptism.' If you will read again the passage in the 6th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, you will find the four different, but yet very similar terms, 'dead,' 'buried,' 'crucified,' and 'raised,' introduced in immediate connection, and apparently to illustrate the same subject. Now, is it probable that representations so closely related to each other should be thus connected, if some of them were intended to describe an outward rite, and others an inward renovation?

On the contrary, would it not be far more accordant with ordinary rules and apostolic usage to understand the ‘death’ and the ‘crucifixion,’ the ‘burial’ and the ‘resurrection,’ in reference to one and the same great spiritual change?

“3d. I have yet another consideration to submit to you in confirmation of the view now advanced. It is this: that if the apostle, in these passages, refers to a symbolical ordinance merely, he unquestionably ascribes to it effects which you would trace to a much higher source; or, in other words, he teaches the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. This neither of us will admit; but how, with your view of the meaning of the word ‘baptism,’ you can deny it, I do not understand. He says, you will remember, that we are ‘buried *with* Christ, *by* baptism, *into death*.’ He does not, you perceive, state merely that baptism *resembles* a burial, but that it *is* so. Whatever the baptism of which he speaks may be, he represents it as the instrument of the Christian’s spiritual death and burial. It introduces him ‘*into death*,’—it buries him with Christ; and in the parallel passage, as we have seen, he ascribes the Christian’s spiritual resurrection from the dead to the same cause. Now, what *can* that baptism be, by which we thus die unto sin and live unto righteousness, but the

same which Peter says ‘saves us?’ And is this the baptism of water, or of the Holy Ghost? The apostle just named answers the question, by affirming that it is ‘not the putting away the filth of the flesh, (*i. e.* not a mere external purification,) but the answer of a good conscience towards God.’ And to me it seems amazing that any evangelical Christian can take a different view, or imagine that the inspired writer intended to teach us that we are in any sense dead unto sin, and buried with Christ, by a mere immersion of the body in water.

“I am deeply convinced that your interpretation of these words unintentionally countenances the deadly delusion of baptismal regeneration. By attaching, as you do, such *peculiar* importance to this single ordinance, and supporting a literal interpretation of the term ‘baptism,’ in the texts under consideration, you are giving your sanction to a class of teachers, and a system of error, with which, in all other points, you have no sympathy. I was much impressed by this conviction a short time since, when calling at the house of one of our absentee Sunday scholars. I saw a tract lying on the table, which had been just left there by the curate of our parish, who is a semi-papist and a zealous advocate of sacramental efficacy. It was

published, I think, by the Christian Knowledge Society, and professedly written to prove baptismal regeneration. Having requested permission to peruse it, I was not a little struck to find that the two passages upon which I have been commenting, and particularly the words ‘baptized *into* Jesus Christ,’ and ‘buried with him, *by* baptism, *into death*,’ were relied upon as main pillars of that dangerous heresy. Having returned the tract, I am unable to quote it extensively, but I well remember one passage. ‘In these words St. Paul describes the greatest spiritual change which can be experienced,—a death unto sin, and a life unto righteousness. And this he expressly assures us is wrought *in* baptism, or ‘*by* baptism,’—words which clearly point to the instrument by which it is effected. What, therefore, can be plainer from hence than that baptism is the sacrament of regeneration?’ And how, with your view of the import of the word in these Scriptures, you could rebut this reasoning, or avoid this conclusion, I cannot conceive. To me it appears that the doctrine of baptismal regeneration inevitably follows from your interpretation.

“What I have hitherto written has been merely in reply to your leading arguments for immersion; and I have abstained from direct evidence in fa-

vour of a different mode. Nor is such evidence necessary to justify the course which I have recently taken. If it can be shown that immersion could not have been commonly practised in apostolic times, it will follow that some more simple and significant mode must then have been in use. Whether this was pouring, or sprinkling, or both, cannot now be certainly ascertained from the sacred writers. Upon these immaterial points they are just as silent as they are respecting immersion. In your sermon, you demanded a single passage which required sprinkling; but, surely, you had forgotten that your brethren, with equal firmness, but with no better success, ask you to produce a command to be immersed. There is neither,—a pretty clear evidence that the author of this service did not attach to the *method* of its observance that measure of importance which is ascribed to it by you. My belief is—and I found it, amongst other reasons, upon the absence of minute direction respecting the mode—that the essence of the rite consists in the application of water to the body (irrespective of method or quantity) as an emblem of spiritual truths. And I believe, also, that mode to be the best by which these truths are most vividly represented to the mind. What this is can, I think, be a matter of inference only. *Your*

inference favours immersion; *mine* affusion. In that method you discern a symbol of the Spirit's operations. But this I cannot discover. In sprinkling or pouring, on the contrary, there appears to me a beautiful and most expressive image of these operations,—an image which, in my view, shadows forth as vividly as any visible act could do things spiritual and divine.

“ I shall now bring this letter to a close. But before I do so, permit me to present two or three questions for your candid consideration. And, in the first place, I would request you to reflect, whether your mode of baptism agrees either with the Scripture doctrine of divine influence, or with those accurate representations on this subject which you are accustomed to address to your hearers. In the sacred writings, we are taught that the Holy Spirit is the gift of God,—that his influences are poured out upon us from on high. But is this the idea which your mode of baptizing is adapted to convey? When you take a convert and plunge him under the water, do you imagine that such an act would easily and naturally suggest the truth, that the sacred influence which the water represents is *shed down* upon us from God? Is there the slightest correspondence between such a doctrine and such a practice? On the contrary, is

there not between them the utmost variance? If immersion is adapted to teach anything it is this, that we are applied to the Spirit, not that the Spirit is applied to us,—that our souls must be dipped in his influence, not that his influence must descend upon our souls. Did I not know that on this point your preaching was more sound than your practice, and that the orthodoxy of the pulpit would counteract the heterodoxy of the baptistery, I should contemplate your immersions with serious alarm.

“ But permit me, in the second place, to inquire how you can account for the remarkable disagreement between your mode of symbolizing divine influence, and that which God had enjoined and sanctified under the former dispensation. As the spiritual grace is the same in all ages, it would be natural to expect that, if symbols were employed at all, the mode of their employment would also be the same. And this, I believe, will be found to have been the fact. Now of all the “divers baptisms” administered under the law, there was not one which resembled yours. In no single instance did priest or Levite plunge the people. Of this the evidence is complete. But sprinkling, on the contrary, was constantly employed. If, then, this mode, enjoined by God to represent the shed

ding forth of his Spirit, was for ages deemed best suited for this purpose, why should it have been superseded by another, certainly not *more* expressive, and as I conceive much less so? Can you discover any good *reason* for such a change, or indeed any reason at all? And is there any *authority* for it? I can neither imagine the one, nor discover the other. And, therefore, in the absence of both, I cling to the consecrated symbol, and would even venture to offer the advice that, in your future discourses on baptism, you speak with less dogmatism and contempt concerning a mode of baptizing originally selected by infinite wisdom, and consecrated for ages, as the emblem of the Spirit's grace.

“There is a third question with which I am tempted to trouble you. It is this; How, upon your views, do you account for the circumstance that, in all the predictions and promises of the Holy Spirit contained in the Old Testament, you never meet with any allusion to divine influence which agrees with your favourite mode of representing it? Had God intended to appoint immersion as the standing and only symbol of the Spirit's operation to the end of time, might we not have expected to find some metaphor or some reference in accordance with this practice? But there is

none. Not a line, not a word occurs in psalms or prophecies which alludes, even in the most remote manner, to dipping, plunging, or any such mode of employing the element which God has consecrated for the service of his sanctuary. But while there is not a syllable which agrees with immersion, there are several very striking descriptions of the dispensation of the Spirit which allude to the mode which you reject. Need I remind you of such passages as the following? ‘Then will I *sprinkle* clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.’ ‘So shall he *sprinkle* many nations.’ ‘I will *pour* water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will *pour* my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.’ ‘And it shall come to pass afterwards that I will *pour out* my Spirit upon all flesh.’ Now, how is this? With the importance which you attach to your *mode* of baptizing, how do you account for the very strange circumstance (to say the least of it,) that numerous prophecies of the descent of the Holy Ghost should exactly agree with affusion, but *never* with immersion?

“And between these prophetic representations of the Old Testament, and the history of their accomplishment in the New, the accordance is most exact. Here we read that the Holy Spirit

‘came upon’ those that received him; that he ‘fell upon’ them, was ‘shed upon’ them, and was ‘poured upon’ them. Now, as visible symbols and audible sounds are only two forms of language—the one addressed to the eye, the other to the ear—we might therefore naturally expect, when both are employed to represent one thing, that some correspondence would be found between the mode of representation. And this correspondence exists between the ‘divers baptisms’ of the law (which were principally sprinklings) and the manner in which the prophets describe the divine influence, of which these sprinklings were the sign. Why, then, should no such agreement appear under the gospel? While the same *verbal* form is retained, what reason can be assigned, or imagined, why the *visible* should be changed? Why should the counterpart of a promise to *pour out* be found in the very different mode of *plunging in*? And why, moreover, should a long consecrated symbol of the Spirit’s influence be superseded by another, which presents no accordance whatever with the language either of the Old Testament or of the New? How is all this to be explained?

“But I must trouble you with one question more, and it shall be the last. Without asking

you to account for the singular circumstance (singular, I mean, if the word 'baptism' only signifies immersion) that, when the Saviour's promise—'Ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost'—was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was 'shed forth' upon them, I should like much to know how it could have happened, when Peter saw that 'the Holy Ghost *fell upon*' Cornelius and his company, that *then* 'he remembered the word of the Lord, Ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost?' Believing, as you do, that the word baptize describes a mode of applying the body to water, and that mode to dip, I am sure that anything which '*fell*' upon a person would never *remind* you of a baptism. It would be one of the very last things to suggest such an idea. How, then, did it happen that the descending symbol of divine influence had precisely the opposite effect upon Peter's mind which it must have had upon yours? Why did such an action, unless there was a correspondence between it and the usual mode of baptizing, bring an idea to the *apostle's* thoughts that no *Immersionist* would have ever entertained? Surely he must have had very different associations with the word baptism from those which your practice is calculated to form. And I see not how to account for this

difference, except upon the supposition that Peter had been accustomed to administer the ordinance by pouring, whilst you deem dipping a more excellent way.

“But I will now close these remarks. If I have spoken with honest freedom, forgive me. My object has been to put my points with plainness of speech, because this letter is designed for other eyes besides yours.

“Believe me,” &c.

PART IV.

PROSELYTISM AND PERSECUTION.

ONE Sabbath afternoon, a few days prior to the appearance of the foregoing letter, I went, by invitation, to take tea at the house of one of the deacons of the church, where I was soon joined by another gentleman who sustained the same office. Under all the circumstances of the case, I was somewhat surprised at the apparent friendliness of this proceeding, because I was aware that both these gentlemen were much displeased with me on account of my recent conduct. But the mystery of this unexpected act of courtesy was soon dispelled; and I discovered that the meeting had been concerted with the benevolent design of rescuing me from the error into which I had fallen.

It was, however, with no small difficulty that the brethren brought on the discussion upon which they were intent; for they were evidently anxious that I should not divile their purpose,

and I was not a little amused at their awkward attempts to introduce the subject. In no respect indisposed to discuss the point upon which they apparently deemed themselves invulnerable, I, at length, frankly stated what I supposed to be their design, and begged them to throw off all restraint in conveying to me their opinions. Upon this one of them, after expressing his high respect for my parents, and the hope which he had entertained that I should have trod in their footsteps, added, "But I am exceedingly sorry, my dear young friend, to find that you hesitate to take up the cross and follow Christ." Had I not been familiar with the phraseology in current use amongst the Baptists, I might have mistaken this for a lamentation over my religious indecision, and should never have conceived that it merely referred to doubts on the subject of immersion. But I had been initiated into these mysteries long enough to know the sense in which these terms were employed, and, in consequence, was scarcely surprised at the arrogant assumptions which they involved. I therefore replied by simply saying that, in declining immersion, I was quite unconscious of having disregarded either the precept or example of the Saviour.

I was proceeding to advance more in self-defence, but my lecturer interrupted me with the question, “What! did not Jesus Christ say—‘Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness?’” and then added, in a style meant to be singularly solemn, but with intonation and emphasis quite original, the following lines from Rippon’s Hymns:—

“Hear the blest Redeemer call you,
Listen to his gracious voice;
Dread no ills that can befall you,
While you make *his* ways your choice.
Jesus says, ‘Let each *believer*
Be baptized in my name;
He himself *in* Jordan’s river
Was *immersed* beneath the stream.”

The good man’s elocution, the tone of satisfaction with which he recited the last two lines, and the expression of the mingled complacency with himself and compassion for me with which he fixed his eyes upon mine, as I sat gazing at him with mute surprise, overcame me; and a propensity, for the indulgence of which (though prevention was often impossible) I had been repeatedly punished at school, proved irresistible, and I so far lost the power of self-control that, in spite of every effort,

I burst into a loud laugh. It was a sad slip. I saw instantly that it had exposed me to just censure, and my character to much misconstruction. This soon repressed my risibility, which otherwise would have been only increased by the severe frown with which it was met, and the sad lamentations over my levity. Having endeavoured, as well as I could, to convince the good man that it was far from my intention to treat either him or his opinions with disrespect, I recurred to his quotation, expressed my desire to do whatever the Saviour had enjoined, and requested him to furnish me with a proof of the assertion that he “was *immersed* beneath the stream.”

My demand was readily met in the usual way. Without a moment’s hesitation he quoted Mark i. 9, where it is said that Jesus “was baptized of John *in* Jordan.” The emphatic manner in which he pronounced the preposition “in” created the suspicion that he understood it to mean “under;” and I therefore asked him whether he considered the words “in Jordan” to mean that our Lord was plunged below the surface of that river, or, according to the language of the hymn, that he “was *immersed* beneath the stream?” Having answered in the affirmative, I requested him to turn to the fourth verse of the same chapter, where it is said

that “John did baptize *in* the wilderness;” and I then inquired whether he did not believe that the word “*in*” must have the same signification in both passages. Upon this he began carefully to con over and collate the two verses, and kept me waiting some time for his reply; and, as if he felt a vague premonition of the consequence of answering my question in the affirmative, he expressed his desire to know why I had put it to him, and said “he could not exactly *see* what the wilderness had to do with the subject.” As, however, I would neither satisfy his curiosity, nor withdraw my demand, he at length admitted, though with evident reluctance, that “he *supposed* it *might* be so.” “Well then,” I added, “you must be aware that the wilderness of Judea was about as full of sand as the channels of the Jordan were full of water. If, therefore, the words ‘baptized in Jordan’ mean, as you suppose, ‘being immersed under the *water* of that river,’ must not the similar expression, ‘did baptize in the wilderness,’ mean ‘being immersed under its *sand*?’ Besides,” I added, “in a text to which Baptists are particularly partial, it is said that ‘John was baptizing *in* Ænon;’ which you are aware was not a river, but a place. Now you do not, I presume, believe that he immersed his followers *under* Ænon: and yet you

have precisely the same reason for believing *this* that you have for thinking that they were immersed *under Jordan*."

The good man sat staring, and, as I thought, startled at the discovery which I had made to him; but instead of attempting to strengthen his position, or extricate himself from the difficulty into which his bold assertion had brought him, he began to expatiate upon the qualities of the tea, and to apologize for taking an extra cup. This parenthesis having been filled up, I again requested his attention to the point which I had presented, when he said, "But if the words 'in Jordan' do not mean to be immersed, tell me what *can* they mean?" "That," I replied, "is not my business; but yet I have no objection to comply with your request. In the first place, then, for the reason which I have stated, it is very certain, whatever else they may signify, that the expressions *cannot* bear the sense which you put upon them. This, undoubtedly, is not the idea which they naturally suggest; it never entered into any head but that of a Baptist, and can only be received by giving to the word 'in' a meaning which would, were the same signification retained in several other passages, render them sheer nonsense. But," I added, "there is no difficulty in answering your question.

Baptists, in common with others, understand the words 'in the wilderness,' 'in *Ænon*,' and 'in Bethabara,' to mean 'at' those places; and why should not the passage 'in Jordan' have a similar signification? Why, instead of bearing its usual import, when it occurs before the name of a place, should the word 'in' here, and here only, be rendered 'into' or 'under?' Do show me the reason of this strange difference, and explain why the two passages might not change places, and be as fairly rendered 'at Jordan,' and '*under* *Ænon*,' as 'at *Ænon*,' and '*under* Jordan?'"

Upon this a short pause ensued; and then the other deacon (in order, as I thought, to raise the siege, with which his brother was sorely oppressed) demanded of me *how* John administered the rite, if it was not by immersion. I replied, "that this was a point upon which no one could speak with confidence, because the inspired writers themselves had attached so little importance to the *mode* of baptism, that they had not penned a single syllable on the subject. We were, therefore," I added, "left entirely to inference;" and I then proceeded to state my reasons for this belief, that either pouring or sprinkling must have been generally employed in the service. As, however, most of these have already appeared in the preceding pages, I will not repeat them here.

Although closely engaged with the two brethren, I did not fail to remark that the servant, who had passed round the tea, and who was a member of a Wesleyan Society in the town, was very deeply interested in the conversation ; and that at the close of the refreshment she made much unnecessary work for herself, and, without appearing to listen, was evidently lingering in the room for that purpose. I learned afterwards that the poor girl had been beset by master, mistress, and minister ; and, but for the well-directed instructions of her class-leader, would in all probability have been beguiled, as many uninformed young women had been before her, by strong assertions, and two or three worthless plausibilities, to renounce her early dedication to God, and, without the slightest warrant to be re-baptized.

Shortly after this interview my letter appeared, and created no small stir in our congregation. Moreover, I soon discovered that I had incurred the displeasure of many of them. Some, with whom I had been acquainted from my childhood, became cool and distant. Others, who wished to keep up the appearance of friendship, could with difficulty disguise their dislike. A few, with more courage, ventured in different ways to set before me the evil of my doings. One old gentleman

turned up his eyes, and shook his head, at what he termed “the forwardness and presumption of so young a man” as myself, in writing as I had done to an experienced minister like Mr. R. Another was quite shocked at the “impiety” with which I had attacked what, with an air of infallibility, he assumed to be an ordinance of God. By some, it was whispered that I had been influenced by sinister motives ; and a brother of our pastor boldly avowed his belief that I had been drawn into the snare of the devil, and had reason to dread the judgment which befell Elymas for perverting the right ways of the Lord. Some of the softer sex, with whom, in general, I had been rather a favourite, became all at once intensely bitter in their feelings against me, and very strong in their denunciations. Two of these even volunteered a visit of condolence to my mother, whose sorrow in having such a son they supposed must have been most severe.

There was one of our members who deemed himself a very “mighty man” in this controversy, because he had published a small tract of quotations from Pædo-baptist writers copied from Booth, which were thought to countenance immersion,—a common but most contemptible mode of attack, especially in Baptists, who profess to repudiate

human authority, and to draw their arguments solely from Scripture. This champion of the cause had made no secret of his intention to take me to task, as he phrased it; and I was accordingly forewarned of the danger to which I stood exposed.

I was not surprised, therefore, when, one afternoon, he presented himself at our counting-house; though, I confess, it was just then with considerable reluctance that I laid aside some intricate accounts which I was endeavouring to balance, and entered the polemical arena with this new combatant. He did not, however, give me any chance of evading the subject; but began almost immediately to utter his surprise and regret that I should have forsaken "the old paths," in which my excellent father had so steadily walked. Having assured him that what I had done was the result of anxious thought and much prayer, he expressed his conviction that I was deluding myself, and wondered that I should have "set up" my judgment against such men as Baxter, Burkitt, and some others whom he named. I replied that, instead of setting up my judgment, I had endeavoured to lay it down, and learn at the feet of Jesus what he would have me do. "But have you read my 'Cloud of Witnesses?'" he hurriedly in-

quired. "I have, sir." "Well, and did not that satisfy you?" "Yes, sir, it did most perfectly on one point." "Ah! I am glad to hear that—very glad. I thought a young man of your intelligence would be convinced by names of such weight. I rejoice in it, my dear sir; I do, indeed. Still, it is no more than I might have expected from you; and I am thankful that any humble performance of mine should have yielded satisfaction to a doubting but upright mind like yours."

How long the loquacious tractarian would have gone on in this self-complacent strain, had I permitted him to proceed, I cannot tell; but I was compelled to interrupt his congratulations, by informing him that the one thing of which his production had so thoroughly satisfied me was, not the authority of immersion, but the miserable and pitiable weakness of a cause which was driven from the fair field of Scripture argument to hunt through the volumes of Pædo-baptists, and to tear out of their connection shreds of sentences and scraps of passages, in which, contrary to their general sentiment and practice, a few of them had dropped some careless statement or candid concession, which the unscrupulous controversialist eagerly seized upon, and then strove to pervert into a kind of sanction to his peculiarities. "Yes, sir," I

added, "I *am* satisfied that the stolen support thus brought to prop up a fabric of error, which cannot sustain itself, will only accelerate its fall. Such aid, the cause of truth can never require nor receive. But," I continued, "have you considered the consequence of your method of maintaining immersion? You know that the eminent men whose names you have arrayed against their own practice and principles *condemned* the very course which your denomination has chosen, and themselves pursued the *opposite*. If, then, you attach so much weight to their authority when it seems to be for you, you dare not disregard it when it is strongly against you; and if a few single *sentences* apparently favourable to immersion are deemed so decisive, how can you reject the *volumes* and *treatises* directly against it, which so many of them have written? Beware!" I said; "you are brandishing a two-edged sword. You are bringing witnesses into court who will certainly put you out of it. You are receiving the testimony of men who, with one voice, reject your reasonings and renounce your practice. But yet I am not surprised that the advocates of immersion should seize upon every scrap of evidence which may come to hand, and make so much of the little which they can find in the writings of wise and learned men to get the

slightest countenance to their proceedings. It must be, I am aware, both a humiliation and a mortification for a Baptist to cast his eye over the shelves of a large theological library, and to find there scarcely a writer of any note or weight who has belonged to his denomination. With a few noble exceptions, the whole array of divines is against them. Where there is one eminent Baptist writer, there will be found a hundred on the opposite side. It is not wonderful, therefore, that your defenders should eagerly rake over the folios and fragments of fathers, reformers, prelates, puritans, and non-conformists, in search of shreds and patches, torn from the consistent texture with which they were originally interwoven, in order to form what, after all, is but a scanty and ill-assorted coverlid for the bare system they were anxious to protect. But having obtained such small assistance to their cause, they would be wiser were they not to expose both its weakness and their own, by holding up, as they do, their ill-gotten gain to public gaze, and allowing all around them to see that it is miserably flimsy, and utterly worthless."

I perceived that I had touched my visitor upon a tender place, and that he began to feel some jealousy for his own reputation as an author;

I therefore checked myself, and changed the topic.

Our conversation, however, had not flowed in the new channel long before he suddenly interrupted it, by stating that he wished to say a word to me about what I had written to Mr. R. Having expressed my readiness to hear his remarks, he proceeded to express his disapprobation of the course which I had selected, and was especially dissatisfied at my endeavouring to circulate my letter amongst the congregation. "If your own mind," he said, "had been made up on the subject, why should you try to unsettle others? What *good* can it do? I know several young persons who were quite decided upon the point, and would soon have been baptized, but who have been much disturbed by what you have written; and some of them, I am told, already begin to raise objections against God's ordinance. I consider it wrong, sir," he added, with much energy, "*very* wrong indeed, to draw away the thoughts of serious inquirers from the path of duty."

Although I could with difficulty conceal the satisfaction with which I heard this piece of intelligence, other emotions were still stronger, and I was unable to resist the temptation to reply with more

warmth and asperity, perhaps, than became me. "With regard to myself," I said, "I am quite prepared to hear my motives misrepresented, and my conduct maligned, for having written to Mr. R., just as they were for taking the course which rendered that letter necessary. On this point I feel no concern, and shall offer no vindication. But how astonished I am, Mr. I., to hear *you* condemn me for calling the attention of others to the subject of baptism, when your minister and most of the members of the church (yourself included) are continually doing the same thing. You know well enough that no sooner do young persons in our congregation evince any seriousness, and seem to be inquiring after salvation, than they are assailed on the subject of immersion, supplied with numerous tracts in support of the practice, and allowed no rest until they are under the water. Yes! and you know even more than this. You are well aware that some of our zealots for dipping do not confine their efforts to those who worship with them, but move heaven and earth to proselyte from other Christian bodies in the town." I then named two or three instances of this; and added, "It is notorious that complaints have been repeatedly made by other pastors in the place of the efforts which persons in

our congregation have put forth to draw from under their ministry young disciples whom they had been instrumental in bringing to the Saviour. Instead of seeking their society with a view to confirm their hearts in faith, and hope, and holiness, undue advantage has been taken of their inexperience to induce them to be immersed. Instead of directing the eye of the half-awakened sinner upwards to the cross, it is pointed downwards to the baptistery. Instead of fostering in such the conviction of sin, and confining their view to the Saviour, their serious thoughts have been diverted, and their early impressions dissipated by these proselyting efforts. Had immersion been the sacrament of salvation, it could not have been thrust into greater prominence, nor propagated with more zeal than it is by some individuals whom we both well know. Nor are these parties exceptions to the general spirit and proceedings of your own denomination. In making immersion a term of Christian profession, and in many cases of communion, the Baptists invert the order of things established by the Saviour, fix the pyramid upon its point, and cherish habits of thought and feeling which dry up the sources of charity, and prevent the development of that magnanimity which pure religion pro-

duces. And it is notorious that, of all Christian sects, the Baptists are the most proselyting. How strange, then—how marvelous—familiar as *you* are with such facts as these, that you should censure *me* for doing what your own people are so often chargeable with! But I thoroughly understand all this! To assail the faith of a Pædo-baptist is perfectly right; but to inject a doubt into the mind of a Baptist is extremely shocking! Try might and main to convert the one to immersion,—this is laudable; but touch the prejudices of the other, and, if you do not wish to be covered with hornets, and stung till you are frantic—flee!"

At first my worthy visitor demurred to my charges; but he soon deserted that ground, as if convinced that it was untenable, and said that Christians ought to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and that "they should not suffer a single *pin* of the tabernacle to be removed from its place." He then declared that his main objection to my letter was its spirit; and I requested him to name those parts which he deemed improper. This he declined; and doubtful, from the manner in which he did so, whether he had seen what he censured, I pointedly put the question, and

had my suspicion confirmed. Having expressed my surprise that he should condemn what he had never heard, he admitted that he had relied upon the representations of others; and further, as he was the father of a family, that he had determined that what he understood was a very dangerous production should not enter his house.

Just as he made this avowal, the thought occurred to me that, although I had seen in many of our friends' dwellings controversial pieces in favour of adult immersion, I had never noticed a single work on the opposite side of the question. I said, therefore, that I supposed I had no greater cause for complaint than others who had written in support of the same opinion, and whose productions, I doubted not, had been just as carefully withheld from his children. And I then inquired whether he himself had ever read a single defence of what he contemptuously termed "infant sprinkling;" and requested him, if he had, to name it. He professed that he had seen a good deal of what Pædo-baptists had to say for their practice; but he could not just then recollect the title or author of any particular volume of theirs which he had ever perused, and acknowledged that he had no such book in his possession. Other questions eli-

cited the fact, of which my previous suspicion was strong, that his acquaintance with Pædo-baptist publications was confined to the disjointed fragments and garbled extracts which he had met with in Baptist books and magazines. Similar cases, I well knew, were very common. Many strenuous sticklers for immersion, and some who were accustomed to denounce in strong language a different practice, would, I was satisfied, be found as ignorant as this individual. And I thought then, and think still, that even authors might be named who could not possibly have read the writings to which they professed to reply.

Not long after the conversation just described, Mr. B. called at my father's house, and solicited a private interview. Supposing that he had come to controvert my opinions, and having an indefinable sort of reverence for his person and office, which I had retained from my childhood, I rather shrunk from the interview; and should have felt far less restraint in discussing the baptismal question with many men of much greater skill. But he soon removed my nervousness, by stating that he simply wished to see me in reference to the Sabbath-school. And then, after some rather mysterious generalities about the importance of my position as its superintendent, and the necessity

of good fellowship between the teachers and myself, he inquired whether, with my altered views on the subject of baptism, I did not deem it my duty to resign that office. As, in my great simplicity, I had never imagined that a difference of opinion on a mere form would disqualify me for the management of an institution designed, as I supposed, to teach, not sectarian rites, but spiritual religion, I was confounded by the suggestion ; and, for a minute I felt as if I had been stunned. Observing my astonishment, Mr. B. entreated me not to understand his question to imply the slightest dissatisfaction with the manner in which I had discharged the duties of my office. On the contrary, he commended, in no measured terms, the order and efficiency which had resulted from my efforts, and acknowledged that the institution had never prospered so much as since I undertook its superintendence ; but, he added, he now feared that “ the unhappy change” in my sentiments would prevent in future that harmony which had existed hitherto between the teachers and myself. On this account alone, he assured me that some friends had suggested the propriety of my withdrawal, and that he agreed with their opinion.

Had I yielded to the indignant feelings which this communication excited, I should have strongly

expressed the shame and sorrow with which I regarded such a display of bigotry and ingratitude, and should instantly have resigned my office. For more than four years I had devoted my best energies, both on the Sabbath and during the week, to the business of the school. I had watched over its proceedings with the deepest interest, and with untiring diligence. And I had seen it rise from a state bordering upon extinction to such prosperity that we numbered more children than any similar institution in the town. With the exception of two elderly men, who had been in office prior to myself, and who were, therefore, opposed to all new measures, I had, as I believed, secured the confidence and esteem of the teachers; several of whom, and these the most intelligent and efficient amongst us, had been enlisted by my persuasions. Indeed, so little reason had I for supposing that I was regarded with an unkind feeling, that, only a few months prior to the occurrences which have been narrated, they had a tea-meeting, at which Mr. B. presided, for the purpose of presenting me with a splendidly-bound copy of Calmet's Dictionary, as a testimonial of their regard.

Strongly, however, as my feelings had been aroused by Mr. B.'s proposal, I was happily enabled to control them. I, therefore, simply expressed

my surprise that, on so slight a ground, and in so short a time, the views which he and others had formed of my fitness should have undergone so great a change; but I promised to give his suggestion my best consideration. Upon this he arose to depart; but, before he left the room, my thoughts glanced over the teachers of the school, and, as the names of one and another occurred to me, between whom and myself there had existed the most cordial regard, I could not resist the conviction that *they* were not parties to this petty persecution. I therefore asked Mr. B. whether a meeting had been held on the subject; and being answered in the negative, I inquired how he had ascertained their sentiments. These interrogatories elicited the fact, that the proposition submitted to me had originated with four or five individuals, who were church members, and very rigid immersionists; and that this cabal had contrived to keep their fellow teachers in profound ignorance of their proceedings. I also suspected, what was subsequently confirmed, that the disunion which they feared was that which was expected to result from the influence of my opinions and proceedings upon others. I therefore told Mr. B. that as I had received office from the teachers, I would call them together at the earliest oppor-

tunity, lay his suggestions before them, and act in accordance with their wishes.

This proposal was so reasonable, and yet so perilous, that it fairly nonplussed my good pastor ; and, after a pause, he said that he would have some further communication with friends on the point, and hoped that, meanwhile, I would not call a teachers' meeting, nor name to any one the subject of our interview.

It would not interest the reader, were I to detail the numerous schemes and unworthy proceedings with which the narrow-minded men, whose plans had been frustrated by my proposal to Mr. B., endeavoured to drive me from my post. Making up by diligence what they lacked in ability, I was at length so impeded and annoyed that I deemed it my duty to withdraw from the school ; and what increased the pain of relinquishing engagements in which I had long taken great delight was the circumstance that, contrary to my earnest desire, several of the teachers would follow my example.

This, however, was not the only annoyance to which I was exposed. Few days passed for two or three weeks in which I did not receive one or more anonymous letters,—most of them bitter and badly written, and, without one exception, conveying rather the spleen than the sentiments of their

writers. The bulk of these I destroyed at the time; but there were two or three which I considered worth preservation, and these, although I little imagined then that such a destiny awaited them, shall now be presented to the public:

The first of these communications was the production of a very pragmatical pedagogue in our neighbourhood, who preached in a village a few miles from us, to a congregation consisting chiefly of his own pupils, and who had occasionally occupied Mr. B.'s pulpit. He was, however, by no means popular; and his magniloquence, though at first it astounded a few, at length disgusted all. To some it may seem incredible that a man could have written anything so absurd as the subjoined epistle; but had they known the writer, or had they been but ten minutes in his company, all doubts upon this head would instantly vanish. The question of authorship, however, was not determined merely from internal evidence; but the sapient scribe was so well satisfied with his production, and so assured that it had settled and silenced me for ever, that, from sheer vanity, he could not keep his own secret.

“SIR,—I have read your conceited and impertinent letter to Mr. R—— and I would not have

worn out the knib of a single goose-quill in exposing your folly, but that such stupidity as yours deserves the sharpest strokes of the ferule of truth. I am only sorry that I cannot make you stand upon the dunce's form, with a fool's cap upon your empty skull.

“I should think it beneath me to answer your letter: it would be quite a degradation; indeed, I have too much self-respect. Besides, it would only puff you up with more of that vanity which already makes you, in your own conceit, as big as a balloon, and as empty. You ought, sir, to be made to write the copy ‘Amend your manners,’ until you cried Peccavi.

“You talk a great deal about John the Baptist and the apostles. Now, I should like to be informed what you can know of the capability of these mighty men of God. To say that John could only immerse so many in a day, and that the apostles, at Pentecost, found any difficulty in getting water, or administering the holy ordinance to the three thousand, is quite absurd. It only betrays your ignorance. This is the effect, sir, of pride. ‘Beware of philosophy and vain deceit.’ I almost fear you do not believe in the inspiration of the apostles. What! *such* men not *able* to baptize thousands in a day, or hundreds in an hour!

Do you not know that they could work miracles, and remove mountains? I repeat it,—'tis quite absurd. Jesus Christ told them that 'all things were possible to him that believeth.' Could they not, then, easily immerse thousands almost in no time? There were giants on the earth in those days. I am quite ashamed of your ignorance. But I will not waste words upon one so wedded to his own opinion,—it would only be throwing pearls before swine. I shall leave you, therefore, to the remorse which you will one day feel for having rejected the counsel of God, and drawn away from the truth vain and giddy persons like yourself. I hope you will soon repent of this, your wickedness.

“Your well-wisher,
“MAGISTER DOCET.”

There was another literary curiosity, written, as I conjectured, by some young woman who was a recent convert to immersion. The phraseology is unchanged; but I have corrected the orthography, and supplied the punctuation of the following extract:—

“I was sorry that you should write so about the baptism in our chapel. 'Twas a sweet season to me. As I saw the young ladies standing at the

side of the water, I thought to myself that they looked to me just like the shining ones in the pictures of Pilgrim's Progress that stood upon the brink of the river; and then I thought how beautiful it must have been to see such a many as John baptized, all dressed in lily-white robes, like angels in heaven, by the river Jordan and the river *Ænon*,—and what a grand sight it must have been on the day of Pentecost! I never in my life saw the path of duty to be baptized so plain as I did then; and I was so convinced by that sweet sight that I thought I could stand back no longer.”*

One other extract from these epistles must suffice. The writing was that of a female, and came, I suspected, from one of “the young ladies” referred to in the preceding communication.

“I can speak, sir, from experience, of the benefits of baptism. When I was baptized, I *felt* that I was buried with my Saviour. I shall never forget that season. All your arguments, sir, and all the arguments in the world, will never turn me.

* I should like to have had the ideas of my fair correspondent upon the altered appearance of the “shining ones,” as they emerged from the baptistery with their “lily-white robes” closely clinging to their bodies, rendering the movement of their limbs difficult and ungainly; and leaving a stream of the sacred element in their train.

I would put my experience against them all. And if you, instead of disputing about baptism, had been baptized as I was, you would have been happy too. Many times have I thought of the preecious words,—

‘The holy eunuch, when baptized,
Went on his way with joy;
And who can tell what rapturous thoughts
Did then his mind employ?’

“This was my experience; and I am sure I can use his language, and say,

‘Blessed pool! in which I lately lay,
And left my fears behind
What an unworthy wretch am I!
And God profusely kind.’”

But other communications reached me at the same time, of a very different description, and which I deemed an ample compensation for all the censure which had been cast upon me! Of these, that which was to me the most interesting came from an estimable young man, whose history I will briefly sketch. He was an only child. His parents, who resided near the seacoast, about thirty miles from us, were influential members of an Independent church, and much esteemed

for their works' sake by members of other communities besides their own. About five years before the time of which I write, they had apprenticed their son to a silversmith in our town, who was a member of the Baptist Church. Honourable themselves, they never suspected that those under whose care they had placed him would take advantage of his youth, and exert the influence which they derived from their position, to make him a proselyte to immersion. No stipulation, indeed, had been made,—because they had not imagined that any such precautions would have been necessary, to restrain his master and mistress from tampering with him in order to attach him to their own party. But their confidence was misplaced.

At an early period in his apprenticeship, and ere he had discovered any signs of seriousness, efforts were made to give his mind a Baptist bias. In this proceeding a daughter, some years older than himself, was the most active agent; but her parents were not idle. Frequently at supper, as I afterwards learned from his lips, the subject was introduced, and strong representations set forth of the duty of immersion, and the evils of a different mode of baptizing. It was not, therefore, surprising that one so inexperienced should

have become an easy convert to the opinions thus pressed upon his attention.

I knew the young man well. He was a most regular attendant at our chapel, and a teacher in our school. His manners were gentle, and his habits retiring; but, as I thought I had observed a disposition to seek my company, I had repeatedly, at the close of business on a summer evening, sauntered with him through the green lanes, and occasionally conversed on the subject of personal religion. Although I was aware both of the opinions of his parents, and of the unwarrantable attempts which had been made to proselyte him, as he was not then a decided Christian, I carefully abstained from any reference to a subject so unsuited to his state of mind. More than once, indeed, he had alluded to the topic, and was evidently anxious to hear my sentiments upon it; but I adhered to my resolution. This course, however, in consequence of my own state of mind, and the indignation with which I regarded the conduct of those with whom he dwelt, I found extremely difficult. Whether he understood my motive for acting thus, I cannot say; but his growing seriousness, and the increasing proofs of gratitude and affec-

tion which I received from him, satisfied me of the propriety of the plan I had pursued.

In this state our relations to each other continued up to the period when I renounced my early views of baptism. But from that time there had been a very manifest change in his conduct. When we met on the Sabbath, indeed, his salutation and smile wore the same bland and affectionate cast as they had been wont to do; but instead, as before, of seeking my society, he evidently shunned it. I was pained at this,—more so, I think, than by any other result of my altered opinions; for I knew him to be a generous and thoroughly ingenuous youth, warm in his attachments, honourable in principle, and perfectly transparent in his general conduct. I resolved, therefore, to seize the first favourable opportunity which might be presented for ascertaining, from himself, the cause of the change which I had noticed. This, however, was rendered unnecessary by the following letter, which he slid into my hand one Sabbath morning:

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—For by this name I hope you will still permit me to call you, although I am fully convinced that I have forfeited all claim to that privilege. You must, I fear, have wondered much at my reserve and distance of late; and,

when I reflect upon it, I am quite overwhelmed with shame, that I could have ever made such a return for the kindness I have received from you, and the good I have, I hope, derived from your conversation. * * * * I could write much more on this subject, but I forbear.

“I could also give you a long account of the causes which induced me to act towards you as I have recently done; but as, in so doing, I should not only expose myself, but also others whose names I wish to conceal, I will not enter into particulars. The fact is, that I heard such strong things said against you, and so many evil motives assigned to account for your change on the subject of immersion, that I almost believed what I am now convinced was utterly false, and thought that I ought to follow the advice of certain persons who earnestly persuaded me to shun your society. All the reparation I can now make for having allowed myself to listen to such calumnies, and entertain such suspicions, is to confess my fault, which I do with sincere sorrow, and to crave your generous forgiveness.

“But this is not the only purpose for which I have taken up my pen. I do so both to convey information, and to ask for it. You are well aware that my dear parents are Independents; and I may

add, that, although most charitable towards other Christians, they are firm believers in infant baptism. I know, too, that they regard this ordinance as a great privilege, and, when rightly observed, very profitable both to parents and to children. Often have I heard them refer to the season when I was thus dedicated to God, as one of the most impressive of their lives; and I know that they look upon this service as an evidence of God's special regard to the young, a striking sign of our need of the Holy Spirit's influence, and a gracious pledge of his readiness to grant this blessing to them and to theirs.

"But frequently as I have heard them make observations upon the practical importance of this service, they never, that I can recollect, treated of it in a controversial tone; and, therefore, when I entered my present situation, I was quite ignorant of the reasons by which Baptists and Independents support their respective opinions. In this state of ignorance, however, I did not continue long,—at least as to one side of the controversy. You are aware that Mr. and Mrs. A., and, indeed, all the family, are very strong Baptists; and it would be difficult for any one to be long in their house without making this discovery. At first, indeed, the subject was mentioned in my presence with

caution; but after a few months, I became rather weary of its frequent recurrence, and was occasionally pained to hear heavy reflections thrown out against the Christian denomination amongst whom I had been brought up.

“At that time, as I cared for none of those things, my impressions were but slight, and of short continuance. Still I often wondered that pious people like Mr. and Mrs. A. should talk so much to me upon such a subject, and should say scarcely anything respecting the state of my soul. Thus things continued until the beginning of last year, when more direct attempts were made to bring me to believe that immersion is the only proper mode of baptism, and, I am ashamed to add, with success. I say ‘ashamed,’ because I now perceive that I was led to this conclusion without anything like a fair investigation of the subject, and without seeking information, or even counsel, from my parents and former pastor. Indeed, to confess the truth, I had so far caught the spirit of those from whom I had received my impressions in favour of immersion as to conclude that not a word could be said in favour of a different practice, and that my beloved relations were only to be pitied, if not condemned, for the delusions under which they were held. This state of

mind, together with the fear of giving them pain, in part restrained me from what I see now was my bounden duty. But I must add that, had not Mr. B. and my master persuaded me not to make any such communications, I scarcely think I should have acted as I did.

“These were my circumstances, when I heard that you had expressed some doubts as to the duty of being immersed; and, notwithstanding my previous views of your character, I was brought to ascribe your conduct to pride, worldly-mindedness, and other unworthy motives.

“This was my state of mind, though I had occasionally some misgivings as to its propriety, up to the time when a copy of your letter to Mr. R. came into my hands. What my feelings were after I had read it, I will not attempt to describe. At first I was disposed to be angry. Your reasonings so completely struck from under me the ground upon which I had founded my belief in immersion, that I was both mortified at my own ignorance, and vexed with you for having exposed it. But I have since read your letter repeatedly, and have carefully considered its arguments; and I now write, not only to apologize for my unjust suspicions, but to thank you, which I do most

sincerely, for the light you have thrown upon my mind.

“Mr. and Mrs. A. do not know that I have seen what you have written, and, if they did, would be much displeased; for not only had they admonished me never to read what they described as a ‘wicked’ production, but expressed their determination not to allow it to enter their family. I believe, however, that they begin to suspect the truth, from my having hinted at one or two of your arguments against immersion, and asked how they could be answered. This was particularly the case a few evenings since, when Mr. B. supped at our house. But my queries brought me no satisfactory replies; indeed, I was fairly silenced by the evident surprise and displeasure with which they were received. Perhaps I ought to have been more candid; but I assure you that, although upon other points I can speak freely, the family with whom I reside are so sensitive on baptism, that I fear they would change their behaviour towards me entirely, did they know what I have now communicated to you. But I do not intend to maintain my reserve much longer. I think it right, however, to give the whole subject rather more consideration than I

have yet done, before I express my decided opinion upon it; and I am particularly anxious to investigate one or two topics, upon which your letter does not touch. By far the most important of these has been so frequently stated in my hearing, and will, I am persuaded, be pressed with so much force when my doubts are discovered, that I will venture to solicit you to favour me with your views upon it. It is this,—If the word translated baptize does not mean to immerse, can it be shown that it means to sprinkle or to pour? I never learned Greek, and cannot therefore ascertain this point for myself; but you, I doubt not, have considered it, and I shall therefore be thankful for the result of your reflections.

“I shall hope to see you soon; but for the present I would prefer a short reply to an interview.

“I am, &c.”

“P. S.—You know Isaac, the porter at Messrs. L. & Co.’s, and I think you will be interested to hear a little concerning him. He came from the same town as I did, and at the time of his removal was under very strong religious convictions. But he was then extremely ignorant,

and greatly required instruction on the essentials of the gospel. Instead, however, of obtaining what would have been so useful to him, he was beset by some of our zealous friends on the subject of baptism, who filled his mind with the opinion that immersion was the only scriptural mode of performing it, until he thought himself so much wiser than his former friends, and even minister, that, from being thoughtful and humble, he became conceited and censorious. Knowing his parents, and feeling some interest in his welfare, I have lately sought opportunity to speak with him on the subject, and to tell him some of the things which are contained in your letter. The effect has been so to shake his faith in his former opinions, and, what is better, in the infallibility of his instructors, that he seems ashamed of himself, and is, I hope, beginning to feel more than ever that 'the kingdom of God is not meat and drink.' If this were known, I fear I should be deemed as mischievous a person as yourself."

This letter, as might be supposed, gave me sincere satisfaction; and I was too much interested in the circumstances of my friend to delay my answer longer than necessary. I

therefore, on the next day wrote the following reply :—

“ MY DEAR —.—“ I sincerely thank you for your frank and friendly communication. It was as gratifying to me as it was honourable to yourself. I had remarked the change in your conduct towards me to which you refer; and I had also (rightly as I now learn,) conjectured the cause.

“ I candidly confess that I am much surprised at the stir which has been created by a circumstance so unimportant as my change of opinion on a point so little connected with the great purpose of life; but I am more than surprised, I am deeply grieved at the bitter feeling which this occurrence has excited. I meet with some manifestation of it almost daily; and if I needed any additional reason for disbelieving the divine origin of immersion, I should find it in the unkind and unchristian spirit which it seems to foster in its advocates. I believe that creeds, like characters, may be known by their fruits; but when I find a single religious rite, yea, the mere mode of administering that rite, raised into a prominence so disproportioned to its importance, and, instead of fostering spiritual excellence, kindling unhallowed fires, I feel assured that it cannot be of God.

‘But I will proceed to notice the topic upon which you solicit my sentiments. I have often heard the argument you have mentioned; and I did not advert to it in my letter to Mr. R., because it was not advanced in his sermon. But its refutation is most easy. Indeed, the objection (for argument it is not,) is only a bold assumption, which has been exposed and exploded a hundred times, but which the Baptists reproduce just as if it had never been answered, or was quite unanswerable. I have called this ‘a bold assumption,’ but it would be more correct to describe it as a combination of such assumptions. It assumes, first, that the original word describes some *mode* of using water; secondly, that in this consists the very essence of baptism; thirdly, that Independents agree with Baptists upon the former point; but, fourthly, that while admitting that the original word describes the mode of baptism, they maintain that it does not mean to dip, but to pour or to sprinkle. All these advantageous points being seized, the conflict is short, and the victory sure. But there is nothing to which this theory corresponds more closely than it does to the Hindoo-fable, which fixes the globe upon the back of an elephant, the elephant upon a tortoise, and the tortoise upon—nothing. Every assumption upon

which the requirement you have named rests is false. Instead of admitting that the original word means to pour or sprinkle, Independents contend that it describes no *mode* of baptism whatever. They are well aware that, in some passages, it could no more be translated to sprinkle than to dip, to pour than to plunge; and they maintain that the term is used simply and solely to designate a rite—an outward purification, without any reference whatever to the mode of its administration. They consider that the word 'baptize,' when it does not designate the work of the Spirit, bears a *general* signification—just such as belongs to the expression 'sanctify,' when used in connection with the ceremonial observances of the Levitical economy. The name, however, thus applied to these ceremonial sanctifications did not describe nor imply the mode of their administration, although sprinkling was that most in common use. But yet these very services Paul designates 'divers baptisms,'—a plain proof that he used the word, as I understand it, to signify a divine ordinance, but not the particular mode of its observance.

"A little consideration will show you that there is a close correspondence between the words 'baptism' and 'Lord's supper.' The latter designation is far more descriptive than the former,

Literally, it means a meal ; indeed, the principal meal of the Jews. But who will maintain that the reception of a very small piece of bread, and a very small quantity of wine, answers to the exact meaning of the word ? Is *this* to eat a supper ? Nothing can be more evident than that the words 'Lord's supper' merely designate an ordinance, and do not describe the manner of its administration. Suppose, then, that the word baptism originally meant an immersion, as certainly as the word supper originally meant a meal, might not the one word be used as a general name of a religious service, without referring to the mode in which it was performed, equally with the other ? And would not the supposition that it was so used be highly probable ? If, then, all that Baptists say as to the original import of the disputed word was correct, it would go for nothing, unless they could overthrow the mass of proof which may be advanced to show that it must have lost its primary signification, and, like the term 'supper,' have become a mere name for a divine ordinance. All this is true, even supposing that the term did originally mean 'dip and nothing but dip.' This, however, is a false assumption, 'the baseless fabric of a vision,' which

dissolves the moment the light of evidence is let in upon it

“I cannot but fear that some Baptists, who require proof that the word in the New Testament means ‘sprinkle,’ lay themselves open to a grave charge. If they know (and how can they be ignorant?) that Pædo-baptists maintain what I have stated, viz., that the word has no reference to mode at all, they resort to an unworthy artifice, when they ask for evidence of the very point which is denied, and triumph as if they had obtained a victory, just because that is not established which was never affirmed. If, indeed, Independents asserted that *baptizo* meant to sprinkle, just as Baptists assert that it means to immerse, then they might be fairly called upon to make good their theory. But when they contend that the term does not describe any mode, to require them to show the contrary, and thus to contradict themselves, and overthrow their own system, is certainly not *very* reasonable.

“Hence, then, you will see how unfair the demand is respecting which you have sought my opinion. And you will further see, that the only evidence in support of any mode of baptism must be circumstantial. Upon that ground, I

have endeavoured to reason out the point in my letter to Mr. R. ; and from it, I am confident, no opponent of immersion can be driven.

“ With a sincere desire that you may be led to a correct conclusion on this and every other subject, believe me, my dear friend,” &c.

I am in possession of many other facts, which would further illustrate the sentiments and spirit of some Baptists; but enough, I presume, has been written to show the weakness of the one, and the exclusiveness of the other. I will, therefore, bring my narrative to a close. Fully convinced that Christian baptism, though not immersion, was both a duty and a privilege, and not having been dedicated to God in that ordinance during my infancy, I felt that it became me to fulfil this obligation immediately. I therefore applied for baptism to the Independent minister in our town, who readily acceded to my request by publicly administering to me that ordinance.

THE END.



